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TACKLE AND QUARTER-BACK

·BY·LESLIE·W·QUIRK·

1. Fiction, American

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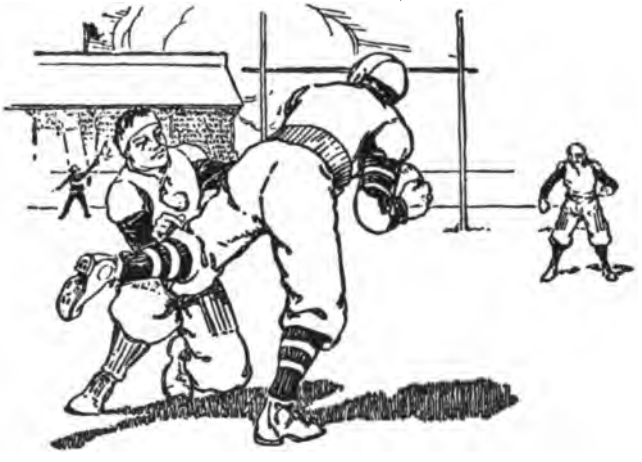
UNIVERSITY

Jackson was fighting for the vengeance of victory.—Page 103

Tackle and Quarter-back

And Other Athletic Stories

By Leslie W. Quirk



Illustrated

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3626

CHAPTER ONE

OUT FOR THE ELEVEN

ON the first afternoon when big Jackson played tackle for the scrub eleven, the 'varsity found him as firm and unyielding as the Rock of Gibraltar. Play after play charged full upon him, only to stop as dead as if they had crashed impotently against an immovable object. Watching from the side lines, Coach Parker had already chanced upon the football sobriquet borrowed from history for the man—"Stonewall Jackson."

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Now the position of left-tackle on the first eleven was a raw sore. One after another, six husky, but stupid, aspirants had rubbed it with salted incompetence; and Parker had writhed at the pain. But in this new Viking, blond and big and fearless, the coach saw the remedy. So the next afternoon found Jackson playing on the 'varsity team.

But he failed; failed dismally. His playing was listless, and, worst of all, brainless. Something—some stimulus, some incentive of the day before—had worn off, and left him a stolid hunk of bone and muscle. The body was still there, magnificent in its possibilities; but the spirit was missing.

The sore was unhealed. Reluctantly, Coach Parker admitted it to himself. "Yesterday was only a flash in the pan," he decided. "He's an in-and-outer; not 'varsity material."

Jackson, displaying no emotion whatever, was shifted back to the second eleven. Parker saw the little scrub quarter-back put his hand on the giant, and speak an encouraging word. He fancied that he detected the tackle straightening his shoulders and

setting his teeth hard; but even this did not prepare him for the sudden metamorphosis of the man. For, on the very next scrimmage, Jackson charged through the opposing 'varsity line as a bull might have galloped through a mammoth sheet of paper, and downed the man with the ball so violently that for some seconds he lay dazed where he had fallen.

Nor was it the spasmodic accident of pique and revenge. For ten long minutes Jackson tore the other line to shreds, stopped with disastrous precision the plays that cannonaded upon him, and wound up his exhibition with a thirty-yard elephantine run, apparently little retarded by the desperate tacklers hanging fly-like to his body and legs. Jackson had found himself again.

It took Coach Parker nearly a week to unravel the mystery; a week that left him with rasped nerves and an unenviable reputation of slave driving. There were days when Jackson was phenomenal; there were others when he would have disgraced a high school eleven. At length, after the squad had scrimmaged for hours at a time, solely that Parker might

study one candidate for linesman, it dawned upon the groping coach that certain combinations of players brought out the man's full ability. After that, it was only a step to the solution.

Jackson played his real game when working in conjunction with little Payson, substitute quarter-back. The boy weighed only one hundred and twenty pounds, and, although gritty and clever, had never been graded as of big-team caliber. Yet he possessed the ability to infuse the tackle with a fighting spirit which at once appalled and delighted the coach. The problem of filling the gap at left-tackle was solved—conditionally.

That night Parker called on Jackson. The player greeted him with refreshing modesty. He refused to talk about himself, but managed to worry the coach by declaring that he really had no ambition to make the eleven, and wasn't going to break his heart trying. He was out for practice, indeed, largely because—Here he hemmed awkwardly, and looked embarrassed.

"Well, Mr. Parker, it's this way," Jackson finally admitted. "I agreed to try with the squad because

That night Parker called on Jackson. The player greeted him with refreshing modesty.— Page 8

'Pennyweight'—young Payson, you know—wouldn't go out as a candidate unless I did. We come from the same town, were kids together, and played on the grammar and the high school teams till we two got to working like a machine." He paused for a moment, and the coach could glimpse the spirit of those boyhood days in the sparkle of the other's eyes.

Then the tackle leaned impressively across the table at which they sat. "Mr. Parker," he prophesied solemnly, "Pennyweight Payson's going to be the greatest quarter-back this old university ever had!"

This speech took the coach so by surprise that he had no reply ready. He had studied little Payson, as he had studied every other candidate who showed any promise whatever. The boy was good in a passive manner, and occasionally displayed the earmarks of the real genius that is characteristic of a born quarter-back; but he was too light, and ordinarily he lacked the tangible animal exultation which marks your real football star. As he reviewed his playing now, Coach Parker realized suddenly that the boy had played wonderful football during the odd moments

when Jackson had been at his best. One seemed to inspire the other.

The tackle watched his visitor narrowly. He had expected a prompt agreement, and the other's silence disappointed him.

"He doesn't weigh much," he admitted, presently, "and the fire of the game seems to burn out in him now and then; but he's clean grit, Mr. Parker, and he's got a head. Why, sometimes just a word from him shows me how to catch the other eleven napping; and sometimes, when I fail, he looks at me, and chirps, 'Next time, Stonewall!' and I forget everything except that he expects me to make good—and I do! He—why, if the team got to know him as I do, they'd plow through a mountain just to please him."

"I see," said the coach slowly. "I see, Mr. Jackson. I—I'll bear in mind what you say. Be at practise early to-morrow afternoon. Good night."

Out in the cool air, Parker wiped his moist forehead. "I thought so," he told himself. "The little chap's the inspiration, the driving power, and the big one's

the muscle and beef. They work together like a team, but separate them and both are lost. Each has in him the attributes of a great player, but I am absolutely powerless to develop either by myself. Their salvation lies in my ability to make Stonewall coach Pennyweight into becoming a star, and vice versa. Why, it's a greater game than football itself. Well, we'll see; we'll see!"

Payson was clearly bewildered by the sight of the head coach at his door. The boy looked ridiculously frail and light for a football player, and Parker smiled over the curious nickname of Pennyweight. It fitted admirably.

"I want to talk to you about Jackson," he told the quarter-back, wisely concluding this was the best way to put the boy at his ease. Nor was he mistaken. Payson's smile was unembarrassed now, and his eyes widened with pleasure.

"Oh, you mean good old Stonewall," he said. "We grew up together, Mr. Parker, and he's the finest chum a fellow ever had. He'll wake up the football world some of these days, too." He hesitated a second, and

then blurted out anxiously, "You think he'll make good, don't you?"

"He plays a wonderful game—at times," evaded the coach.

Payson's face clouded. "Yes, I know," he agreed. "He—it won't predjuice you against him, will it, Mr. Parker, if I tell you what his weaknesses appear to me to be?"

The coach smiled a ready dissent.

"Well," began the little quarter, looking guiltily at the ceiling, as if he were about to betray his friend, "first of all, he's too dependent upon me just now. You see, he's so fanatic over what I think and do that he refuses to extend himself except under my direction."

"That weakness," said Coach Parker, "may be overcome by putting you both on the same team."

"Oh!" exclaimed Payson quickly, "Oh, I'm not good enough! I'm afraid I'll never do, except when I'm prodding Stonewall, I don't seem to have the spirit of the game in me. Why, I'm just practising to keep the big fellow out playing; and if I can help you by

encouraging him in the scrimmages before the big games, I'll do it, of course. I—I've wanted to tell you I wasn't fool enough to try to displace Elton at quarter. I'm just out to get old Stonewall into his stride."

Coach Parker smiled again at the earnest little chap. There was something so boyish and unselfish about him that the man felt particularly drawn to him. It was little wonder, he thought, that a comparatively slow-witted man like Jackson should fairly worship him.

"And what is your friend's other weakness?" the coach asked presently.

Young Payson squirmed a little in his chair before he answered. It was hard to put the trouble into words and still keep Jackson upon the pedestal of greatness.

"He's slow to learn," confessed the boy with an effort. "I dare say you have called it sluggish thinking, or lack of quick-witted appreciation of plays. But that's quite wrong. Stonewall is slow to learn because he believes he has mastered every point of the game already, and you can't convince him he must practise

with an analytical mind. He refuses to accept hints about the strategy of the struggle, even from me. He just doesn't understand that he must work his mind as hard as his body to win. I can't convince him; you couldn't. He needs some good lesson."

"The coach nodded. "My boy," he said, "you have analyzed your friend more keenly than I have done. He has weaknesses, serious ones, which must be overcome; and he does need to be convinced, other than by mere words, that football is a battle of wits quite as much as it is of muscle. Now, I want to tell you something, which you have perhaps not realized. His success or failure on the team is going to depend almost wholly upon you. I am going to put into your hands the developing of Jackson into a great player."

The quarter-back's eyes were shining, "I'll do my best, sir," he promised, "both for your sake and for his."

"I knew you would," said Coach Parker quietly. "Now, let's see if we can not unearth some plan for making him 'find himself.' Our own squad is so far advanced that Jackson is going to follow the rut. I

wish he could come in contact with some eleven that is taking its first scrimmages. There's the Colton College squad, for example. . . Look here, you come from the city, don't you?"

"Yes, sir; my father is in business there."

"Good, Payson, suppose you take Jackson with you to-morrow, and run down to the city for a day. I'll excuse you both from practise in the afternoon. Go out to the college grounds about the time its squad turns out. Once you get there I want you to exercise your ingenuity enough to bring about a definite result. It's just this."

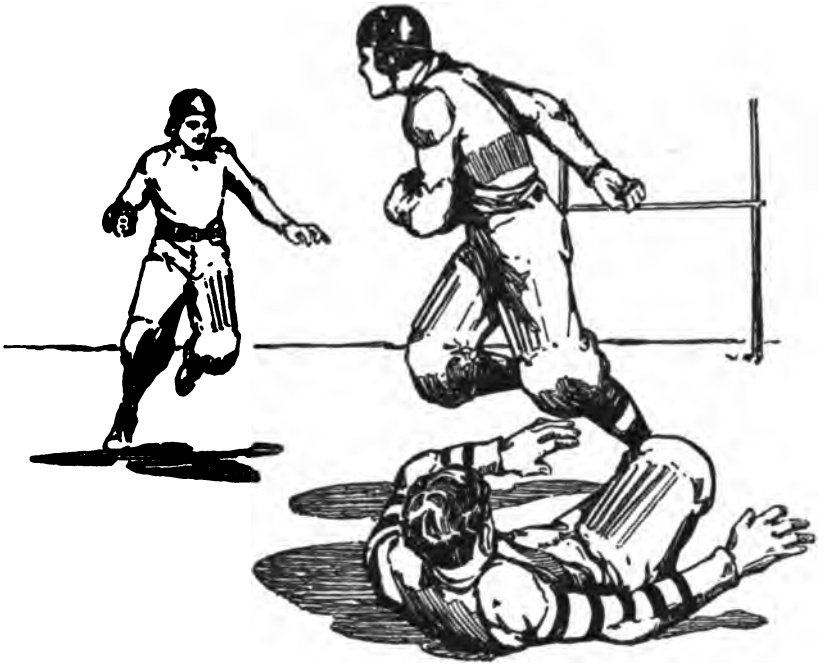
For a half hour more the two talked. The coach outlined a plan he had in his mind, and the little quarter-back listened with an occasional suggestion or word of approval. When Parker arose to go, both were smiling and chuckling like children.

"If it works," began the coach, "the—"

"I will do my share, " declared Payson.

"Then I imagine one Stonewall Jackson will awaken from his lethargy with a rude and sudden shock. Good night and good luck."

"Good night," echoed Pennyweight Payson, and he watched Parker walk down the hall to the farther end. Then he gently closed the door of his room, and straightened his shoulders. "Good old Stonewall," he murmured, "I'm going to work my head off to make you the greatest football player they've ever had here."



CHAPTER TWO

SCRIMMAGING WITH COLTON

EARLY the next morning, Pennyweight Payson walked briskly into his chum's room, after waiving the formality of knocking, to discover big Jackson just completing his dressing. The tackle eyed his caller with mild curiosity.

"If it's an invitation to a sumptuous breakfast somewhere," he challenged, "I accept."

Payson laughed good-naturedly. "Really, Stonewall, I hadn't counted on such reluctance. Why are you so backward and retiring? As a matter of fact, however, I just dropped in to tell you that I expect to run over to the city for the day."

"What about football practise this afternoon?" demanded Jackson. He was very serious now, for the athletic welfare of his friend was a matter close to his heart.

"Coach Parker has excused me from reporting this afternoon," explained the little quarter-back, "and—"

"In that case," interrupted the other, "I think I shall go with you."

"But—"

"But nothing! What if I am expected to practise? As you know very well, I am just out to boost you into deserved popularity. Besides, strictly between us two, I imagine I know about as much football now as anybody on the squad."

Payson's brow set in a frown. "Stonewall," he

"In that case," interrupted the other, "I think I shall go with you."— Page 20

accused sternly, "you're a very much misguided mortal. Just because you're a comparatively insignificant cog in the football machine, you manage to accomplish your set duty. But if the other players were new and untried, and you were just breaking in yourself, you'd wreck half the scrimmages because you are laboring under a delusion that your brawn offsets the need of playing with your brain. I'd like mighty well to wake you up just once."

"My boy," said Jackson, grinning under the tirade, "I will confess this much: in all my wanderings about the class rooms, I have as yet failed to find a professor who can lecture with the sincerity and point you inject into your brief talks. But that's quite outside the question. Do I accompany you to the city?"

"You do," snapped the quarter-back. "Parker has also excused you from practise this afternoon."

"Oh, he has!" exclaimed Jackson, experiencing a strange sense of pique over the natural interpretation of such action. "I suppose he figures that with you gone, I'd be a lump of useless clay. Well, perhaps he is right." But in spite of his words he scowled a pro-

testing denial. "But tell me, Pennyweight, how are we to improve our minds in the city."

"First," replied Payson, "I want to see Dad for a few minutes. Then we might run up to Colton College and get some pointers on playing football by watching the practise."

The big tackle laughed derisively. "Pointers from Colton, eh? Why, Colton's not in our class, at all; you and I alone could probably defeat its eleven. Still, I dare say it will amuse us to watch the scrimmages. Come on!"

So it happened that the early afternoon found the two on the campus of Colton College. It still lacked an hour of the time for football practise, and Payson left his chum sitting comfortably propped up against a tree while he braved the gymnasium to find a friend, whose aid he hoped to secure in the furthering of the plan which Coach Parker had broached the night before.

Left alone upon the deserted campus, big Jackson waited patiently, drowsing now and then. Presently he discovered the football squad emerging from the

gymnasium, and roused himself and followed it with lazy indifference to the athletic field. Once there, he found, to his astonishment, that Payson was not present. As the practise was not secret, it really made no very great difference, except for the fact that he felt a little lost among the group of strange college chaps on the side lines.

The practise was hard. This college began its semester a week or two later than most of its rivals, and the coach was driving the players as much as he dared, to make up for lost time. The squad was also disappointingly small, and the lack of material must be offset by science and individual skill.

Despite his remarks of the morning, Jackson found himself thoroughly interested. It was good to see them run and tackle and kick. After a bit, he forgot all about Payson. His impulsive nature got the better of him, and he worked out into the field, crouching when the backs lined up waiting for the ball, and springing forward as they did.

Suddenly somebody touched him on the shoulder. Jackson peered into the perspiring face of the coach.

"Ever play?" asked the man shortly.

"Oh, yes!" said Jackson. He said it proudly, and the coach smiled derisively.

"High school team, I suppose?" he remarked dryly.

It was on the tip of Stonewall's tongue to tell the man who he really was, and to explain that he probably knew more football than the whole green squad out there. But he hesitated, turning over and over in his mind a plan. He grinned at the thought of surprising Pennyweight.

"Yes, sir," he said meekly, in answer to the question.

"Go over there and get a suit," ordered the coach.

The blood mounted to Jackson's cheeks at the brusque manner in which the man spoke, but he said nothing. If the coach took him for a student of this secondary college, why let him. He would get into the togs and show him how they played the game back at his university.

He hauled on a padded suit that he found in the locker room, and sniffed joyfully the odor of perspiration. After all, he did like the game.

The coach eyed his great form silently, although Jackson took pains to stride along with the lumbering gait common to heavy muscled athletes, and ordered him in at left half-back on the scrub or second team. The substitutes looked at him hopefully.

Ten minutes of sharp signal practise sufficed to put him in touch with the more simple plays, and he was glad when the coach lined up the two teams in the middle of the field. Now he would show them what he could do!

The 'varsity had the ball. The little quarter-back's sharp eyes passed rapidly over the eleven players on the other team, and he gave the signals with queer, jerky intonations.

Suddenly the ball was snapped. The whole team seemed to work on a pivot. It was an end run, timed to a second, and seemingly almost impregnable in its interference. Jackson only smiled; they'd be a bit surprised when he crashed into the play, should the little end man miss the ball.

As a matter of fact, the end was caught by the first man in the interference, and sent whirling far out into

the field. Jackson set his teeth, still smiling with his lips, and dived for the runner.

Something—somebody—caught his shoulder with a terrible grip, and he turned over and over. Two players fell with him. After they had piled off, he lay still a moment, dazed and wondering.

"Get up there!" ordered the coach, urging him with his foot. "Don't be a baby; you made enough of an ass of yourself in that play. Get up, I say."

Jackson jumped to his feet. He was fairly crazed with anger, but down in his heart he realized that the man was speaking only the truth. The smile was gone now, and the chin was pushing forward.

"I'll make good on the next play," he told himself. "I'll show him!"

He watched the agile little quarter-back like a hawk, and decided the play was to go through the line. He heard the signals come in quick, staccato tones, and saw the hands of the quarter-back open suddenly.

There was a snap of the yellow pigskin, and the ball was passed to a half-back, who lowered his head

and charged straight ahead, apparently with a quick intuition of the weak spot in the line.

On the instant, Jackson's big shoulders were backing the man at tackle. He dug his cleated shoes into the soft dirt, and pushed with all the power of his great body; pushed until the blood was making his very face burn.

But there was no concerted effort on the part of the other players on the scrub team. The great mass moved him back and back and back. He was a useless pigmy. It looked like a touchdown in the end, and only the quick action of his full-back in falling just in front of the surging mob, and plunging it to the ground over him, prevented the scoring.

Jackson scrambled out of the scrimmage, and stood waiting for the others to get to their feet.

"Afraid, eh?" sneered a voice in his ear. "Did you think you could push the whole team back? Why didn't you get down in front of them away back there, as Bilter did? Afraid, I suppose?"

Jackson whirled angrily upon the coach. The man stood staring at him with curling lip, and somehow

the rage in the boy's heart vanished. He wiped his steaming face with a sleeve of his jersey.

"Not afraid!" he declared shortly, and went back to his position.

Three more plays came right into Jackson's arms, and three times the coach looked derisively at him, and called out:

"First down; ten yards to gain!"

Then the man gave the scrubs the ball, and took the quarter-back to one side and whispered instructions as to the play.

Stonewall found his place, and leaned forward expectantly. There was a moment's wait while the coach showed the left-guard how to brace his knee back of the center-rush, and Jackson looked at the opposing half and grinned.

"Keep your eye on the ball!" snarled the coach, suddenly. "You told me you had played the game."

There was a sneer in the words that rankled in the big player's heart, but he swallowed hard and said nothing.

"Four—two—three—seven," called the scrub quarter-back.

It was Jackson's signal. He gritted his teeth and waited, watching with fascinated eyes the dirty leather that quivered in the hands of the stolid center-rush.

The quarter-back called for the ball, caught it deftly in his two palms, and swung round. Jackson's start was a little slow, and before he was fairly under way the gap in the line had widened till a team might have driven through the breach, and he had been tackled from behind for a loss. Without the cooperation of the other players, his brawn and muscle proved to be worthless.

The coach yanked off the 'varsity men on top of him, and set big Stonewall upon his feet. He looked at him silently for a moment, and Jackson's cheeks colored guiltily. He knew the fault was solely his in starting late.

"Four—two—three—seven," called the quarter, at a nod from the coach. Jackson understood well enough that the boy could vary the numbers in such a way as to confuse the other team, and still have the

same play; he knew, too, that the coach was handicapping him in every way possible. He gritted his teeth and waited.

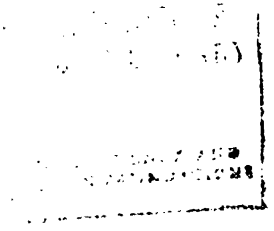
This time he sprang forward at the exact instant the ball was off the ground, and was scurrying away and almost skirting the end before the 'varsity was ready for him.

With his heart beating exultingly, he ran with all his might. One by one the interference vanished as tacklers appeared, until he found himself running alone. Between him and the goal was only a single player. At last, he would make a touchdown and prove his ability to the maddening coach.

With a sudden plunge, the last tackler dived and caught him just above the knees. Jackson had not expected him to come with such terrific force, and the shock took him off his balance. He wavered a minute, and instinctively threw up his hands as he fell. The ball rolled to the ground, bounded erratically, and sped away like a thing alive.

One of the 'varsity men swooped it up, and charged back up the field, dodging, squirming, sprinting des-

He was scurrying away and almost skirting the end before the 'varsity was ready for him.—Page 32



perately through the few who were in his path, until he found a clear field and planted the ball behind the goal line, squarely between the two whitewashed posts.

Jackson wiped the sleeve of his jersey across his face, and watched a tall player boot the pigskin over the bar for the goal. Then they lined up for a kick-off. Down in his heart, an admission was growing that he had been over-rating his own ability as a player.

The ball was sent hurtling through the air straight to him. He made the error of trying to catch it with his hands rather than with his arms, and felt it rebound from his breast. Although one of the scrubs recovered it he knew the error was unpardonable. The coach sneered openly.

With clenched fists, and angry, pumping heart he waited for the first play. The quarter-back gave the signal, and he took the ball and plunged against the opposing line.

The attack was futile. He had charged toward a point which was practically impregnable, instead of toward one that promised to give way. It was an error of judgment. He was battered back in spite of his

best animal endeavors. Worst of all, he began to see that it was not muscle and weight that was overpowering him, but better and brainer football. He was being beaten because he failed to use his wits as well as these raw recruits who were so eager to learn.

How the next ten minutes passed, he could not have told himself. Sore, aching in every limb, angry, disappointed, he played with a desperate energy and eagerness that almost frightened him. He was insane with the desire to do something; with the knowledge that he was playing like a witless beginner who had never seen a football before, instead of like one who had crossed the white lines of his own university field with a whole team in full cry behind him. But always there were arms clinging about his legs, or hands pulling savagely at his jersey, or tripping figures lying flat in his path.

At last, tired and throughly discouraged, his vision cleared, and he admitted defeat. He was not the player he had thought he was; he lacked all intimate knowledge of the game; his former success had been because of the quick-witted aid of his fellows and not

because of his own muscle and brawn. With the lesson came a little relief; there was consolation in knowing that he was doing his best, even if it was not equal to the best of the others.

When the coach ordered the players to stop practise and run in, he took Jackson to one side.

"I don't want you to think I am using you any differently from the others," he apologized gruffly. "You needed the gruelling. I have been working you hard, and making you fight from sheer desperation, because you look promising. You play like a novice, but you know the game; I can see that. The trouble is, you think football is a mere matter of muscle, with the most beef winning. You haven't been made to realize that it is the most intricate sport in college, and demands an understanding of its technical principles which you lack totally. As soon as you get that idea out of your head, you'll do. Understand what I mean?"

Jackson nodded. He had meant to save this minute for the final revelation of his identity. Now he had no desire to explain who he was. He looked at the coach very soberly.

"You're right," he said, smiling in spite of a cut lip; "I've been a fool, I'm afraid, in more ways than one. This practise has opened my eyes."

The coach extended his hand. He was thinking only of the player's personal development.

"Good for you!" he said; "good for you!"

It was a half hour later when Jackson and Payson met. The former had taken his shower baths, and discarded his borrowed football suit for his street clothes. He grinned a little sheepishly at Pennyweight.

"You saw it all, I suppose?" he questioned.

His chum nodded. He was studying the big player with curious, hopeful eyes.

Jackson cleared his throat with unnecessary vigor.

"Pennyweight," he said, "I suspect that all this was a put-up job. Probably that friend of yours suggested to the coach that I looked as if I might be able to play football, and probably the innocent coach took him at his word. It doesn't really matter how I was inveigled into the game. I couldn't play football. I suppose you and Parker and some others knew that all the time; but I've just discovered it. But, Penny-

weight, I've discovered something bigger than that to-day. First of all, I've found that I haven't used brains enough in my playing; second, I've aroused within myself an ambition to make our 'varsity team, along with you."

Little Payson grinned from ear to ear. He held out an eager hand. "Good old Stonewall," he said; "you have found yourself at last."

"And, continued Jackson, ignoring the other's comment, "I'm going back to our university, and if you and Parker and the others will bear with me a bit, I'll learn the game yet. When does our train leave?"

CHAPTER THREE

PUTTING GINGER INTO PAYSON

"LINE up!" shouted Coach Parker from his position behind the 'varsity eleven. "Look alive now, scrubs. All right, Pennyweight!"

Quarter-back Payson nodded grimly, spat out a jerky signal, and leaned down for the ball. Instantly his back-field seemed sucked hopelessly into the vortex

of the play; but even as the boy sprang forward to join the quick-forming interference, Jackson was at his side, crouching low, with the yellow pigskin in his arm.

As they swept toward the right wing of the line, a great form suddenly blocked the path of the quarter-back, and forced him to dodge nervously. The next second he had crashed into the man, and had sunk into the very whirlpool of surging players.

Back of the scrimmage line, Coach Parker smiled cheerfully as he saw his burly tackle literally bore his way through the other line, throwing tacklers from him with disdainful ease, as if they were irritating flies. On and on he ran, true and unfaltering, until he had crossed the last white line on the field. It was another touchdown for the 'varsity.

But if the team expected praise, it was doomed to disappointment. The coach knew his players had reached the dangerous period of half-knowledge, calculated to soothe them into a false belief in their ability. It was his duty to wake them into a desire for further schooling.

"Jackson," he snapped, "you carry the ball as you

might your laundry package. Jam it up into your armpit, man, with the hand at the other end, and your biceps pressing it hard. Then you can't lose it if they kill you. Jarvis, you failed to hold your man in the line; crouch lower, and brace harder. Peters, back him up with your knee on defense; I noticed you looking around as if you didn't have anything to do. Payson, may we hope to have you in the next play? You dropped out of the interference as soon as you passed the ball. Afraid to keep on as you should?"

The quarter-back looked up with a frown. "No," he said shortly.

"Um—m!" mused Pnrker, ambiguously. "All right, fellows; now, try the kicking game. Get off a few punts, Williams."

To the chagrin of the whole 'varsity eleven, which had considered the criticisms unduly harsh, the first attempt was frustrated by one of the scrub players, who broke through the line and blocked the kick. Coach Parker looked mournfully at his team, outwardly discouraged beyond hope, but inwardly grateful for this added spur to their future play, and then

called time while he laboriously showed the unhappy Jarvis how to squat defensively, with the solidity of a rock and the alertness of a rattlesnake at one and the same time.

"The whole trick," he pointed out, "is to get the jump on your opponent. If you lunge first, you handicap him tremendously; if you go to sleep crouching—well, you've been through that! Try another punt, Williams."

This time the pass was perfect; the line held stanchly; and tall, long-legged Williams sent the ball screwing into the blue of the sky. Twice more he did it, each time surpassing his previous efforts. But on the fourth attempt, owing to a faulty pass from the center-rush, he dropped the oval, reached for it hastily, and, in his eagerness to boot it before it was blocked, sent it flying lamely far to one side of the field, as a wounded bird seeks to escape a hunter beneath it.

The ball struck a great maple tree, slipped from branch to branch for a second, and finally lodged firmly in a crotch, perhaps thirty feet or more from the ground.

Coach Parker called for another ball. It was customary, of course, to take several to each practise; but to-day somebody had blundered, and the yellow oval up there in the tree-top was the only football nearer than the gymnasium.

Ordinarily, there would have been a dozen small boys, hero worshipers, fighting for the privilege of climbing the tree and recovering the pigskin. But to-day the practise was secret, in preparation for the big game with Veeder University on the following Saturday, and was being held behind locked gates, with all spectators barred.

Coach Parker looked at his squad, grouped with upturned eyes about the tree.

"Payson," he said, "you're about as light as anybody, and look as if you could climb a tree. Shinny up there, and get our ball."

The little quarter-back nodded slowly, but hesitated. "I—I'm not much of a climber," he admitted, "and—"

"Afraid?" asked the coach.

There it was again. Twice to-day Parker had

questioned his bravery. Well, he would give him no further cause, and with an angry head-shake in answer to the insult, he was soon climbing to the first limbs of the tree over Jackson's solid shoulders.

Twenty feet from the ground he stepped upon a dead branch, which gave way with the report of a pistol. He clutched saving limbs as he felt himself falling, and was soon upon a secure footing once more. But the sudden fright had left his heart beating rapidly, and had shaken his confidence in his ability to go on higher. Then he looked up at the taunting yellow ball in its nest of green leaves and recalled the slurring tone of Parker's voice. It wasn't a question of what he wanted to do at all. He must get that ball.

The inevitable happened. With his nerves all on edge, his feet repeatedly breaking rotten branches of the half-dead tree, and the high wind pulling the swaying limbs from his grasp, he slipped presently, frantically clutched to right himself, and went hurtling down toward the horrified little group under the tree. As he fell, his leg hit sharply against one of the lower

limbs, and that turned him half over, sending him plunging to the ground head first.

Luckily he hit upon his shoulder. The fall had been partially broken by the contact with the tree's lower limbs, and by the padding of his jersey, but the shock was great. For a second he lay quite still, unable to move or breathe, wondering vaguely if he had seriously hurt himself. Then somebody—Jackson, of course—lifted him from the ground.

"Hurt much, Pennyweight?" came Stonewall's gruff voice.

All at once the boy seemed to realize that they were making a tremendous fuss over nothing. He squirmed out of Jackson's arms to the ground, and got to his feet a little shakily.

"Why, of course not," he declared. And I'll get the ball out of the tree this time, too."

It was Coach Parker who stopped him.

"No more climbing, youngster. We want able-bodied players for Saturday, and I guess we have had enough practise as it is to win from Veeder. That will be all to-day, fellows; run in."

On Saturday afternoon they did win from Veeder. But the score was fairly close, and Parker's team did not play its game. The nub of the trouble was the quarter-back. Little Pennyweight Payson's handling of the team was miserable, and his own playing even worse. He fumbled on several occasions. He deliberately shrank from mingling in the more vicious scrimmages. Once, when he had an opportunity to make a brilliant tackle, he simply launched himself at the runner, without attempting to clasp his legs; and the man with the ball was not downed until he had crossed another chalk line.

"He's a coward," Coach Parker told himself decisively—and prayed that he might be wrong. "I've suspected it for days, and I've tried to make him reckless by twitting him with it. Well, we can't hope to beat Riker and Middle with Payson at quarter; that is, with the kind of Payson who played to-day. I wonder if I was wrong when I credited him with the ability to become a great quarter-back. I wonder!"

After the game, the coach went back to the gymnasium with the players, and assured himself that they

were getting their shower and tub baths in just the right manner, and were being rubbed down properly, and were using the correct liniments for their bruises and cuts. Once he had satisfied himself in this respect, he sauntered moodily toward the outer door. Here he was stopped by Doctor Hollywood, who was the physical director of the gymnasium.

"Come in here a minute, Parker," he said briskly; and led the coach into his office, and turned the key in the lock.

"What is it?"

"Parker," said the physician, "one of your football players called a few minutes ago and asked me to look him over. First, however, he begged me to promise not to tell you he had been here. I mumbled an ambiguous grunt, that he could interpret either way, and went ahead with my examination. Parker, I couldn't believe you would let a chap play who was in such a physical shape. He'd been hurt."

Coach Parker looked bewildered. "Why, we are all in good trim," he assured the doctor. "Jarvis has a boil on his back, and Peters has lost a bit of skin from

his leg, and—but nobody's in bad shape. What do you mean?"

"This was Payson."

"Payson? Why, he's too—too cautious to get hurt in a scrimmage."

The doctor snorted. "Can't I see?" he demanded. "I tell you he's been hurt pretty seriously. It's his shoulder. Nothing broken. No strain nor sprain. But it's bruised and stiff—why, you ought to see it yourself! It's a hurt two or three days old. I asked him if he'd been resting—favoring it, you know—and he calmly told me that he had played in to-day's game. Parker, are you crazy?"

"I didn't even know he was hurt, Hollywood," confessed the coach soberly. "Three days ago he fell from a tree on his shoulder. He didn't—why, none of us suspected he was hurt seriously. Is it bad?"

"Yes and no. It's put his shoulder in a crippled condition, and I can't understand how he could play. It must have been torture to stretch out his arm, or even to move it, for that matter. On the other hand, it's only a temporary soreness; with treatment he'll be

as sound as ever in a week. The boy must have been a fool to keep on."

"You don't understand, Hollywood," protested Coach Parker. "He was afraid if he begged off, or allowed me to know he had been hurt, that his friend's playing would slump in his absence. And it would. Listen, Doctor, to this tale of the friendship of these two players, and renew your faith in mankind." And he told him of Payson, who played that Jackson might achieve greatness; and of Jackson, who played that Payson might achieve greatness. When he had finished, he rose quietly and went out the door, closing it gently behind him that he might not disturb the thoughts of the physician, who sat staring straight ahead and seeing nothing.

That night Coach Parker ate at the training table with the players, saying very little but watching closely the crippled quarter-back. Not by any sign did Payson hint that even at that moment his shoulder was throbbing painfully. At the close of the meal, Parker put his hand on Jackson's arm, saying,

"Jackson," he snapped, "you carry the ball as you might your laundry package."—Page 41

"Old man, I want to have a talk with you. Suppose we run up to my room."

Once there, the coach lost no time in driving straight at the subject he had in mind. "Stonewall," he began, "what did you think of Pennyweight's playing in the game to-day?"

Jackson drummed uneasily upon the arms of his chair. Once he opened his lips as if to speak, and then shut them without uttering a word.

"I'll tell you what we both thought," prompted the coach, after the silence had become embarrassing. "We thought he was afraid. Am I right?"

The big tackle nodded reluctantly. "It looked that way," he admitted. "Once I hinted to him that that was the trouble, and he went into the next play like a bulldog, but it didn't last."

"Jackson, you did just what I have done once or twice to prod him on. Now, I have something to tell you in strict confidence, and a plan which demands your cooperation. Can I count on you to help me develop your chum, even if the process means pain to you?"

"You do not need to ask me that question," said Jackson simply. "You know I'll do anything for Pennyweight."

Coach Parker nodded. "First, then, I want to tell you that young Payson, far from being a coward, has been showing bravery that is most remarkable in sticking to the game—for your sake—when he should have been in bed." He then outlined what Doctor Hollywood had told him, watching Jackson's blue eyes grow big and proud over the nerve his friend had been displaying. The tackle was for deserting as soon as he had heard the story, and rushing out to find Pennyweight, that he might heap apology and praise upon him. But Parker restrained him, and after a bit quieted him enough to listen to his plan.

"Pennyweight Payson is not a coward," he began, "but he will never be a great football player until he gets the lust of the game in his veins. He plays too much with his brain. He is light, and the knowledge that he lacks weight preys upon his mind until it handicaps him. To put it quite simply, he imagines his playing ability is limited a whole lot more than it is.

Once we teach him to plunge into the midst of the scrimmage, and exult in being buffeted from player to player, and go down triumphantly into the dirt with his arms about the ball, we can arouse a new animal pleasure and ambition in the way he plays the game. Understand?"

"Yes, but how can we force him into the midst of the play if he feels he can do no good there?"

Before he answered, Coach Parker fixed his eyes on the other's face. "By telling him you believe he's an out and out coward." he said quietly. "Do that, and he will play his head off to disprove the statement; he will perform feats of desperate recklessness. It will be like taking his first dive from the high bank, where the big boys have always dived from; once he has been dared into doing it, he'll like it, because at heart he is anything but a coward. But somebody—something—must key him up to do it the first time."

"I won't tell Pennyweight he's a coward," said Jackson, very flatly.

"In two weeks," reminded Coach Parker, "we play our first crucial game. He will be in good condition by

that time—physically I mean. Once we win that game, and when I say we, I mean you and Payson and myself, you can confess to him, and we'll both apologize; and, unless I am mightily mistaken, he'll hold out his hand and say, 'You two have done more for me than I can ever repay. Thank you!'"

"You really thinks the end warrants the means?" asked Jackson, wavering.

"Unless the boy finds himself within the next month, I can not retain him as quarter-back of a team that is fighting for the championship," said the coach, frankly. "I am asking you to help me develop him."

"Parker," shouted Jackson, suddenly, "I'll do it! I'm going to work my head off, and come mighty near breaking his heart for a time, to make him the greatest football player they've ever had here!"

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FIRST BIG GAME

THE knocking was repeated, this time more insistently.

"Well, come in!" called Pennyweight Payson, marking the point in his Latin translation at which he had been interrupted. He watched wearily and without curiosity as the door swung open.

"Oh, it's you, Stonewall!" he greeted, smiling in a manner not quite natural. "Find a chair for yourself, big man, and talk."

To Jackson there was something pathetic about the boy's forced lightness of speech and mien. Ever since that first time, now more than a week ago, when he had openly accused the quarter-back of cowardice, their former friendship had been sadly strained. If Pennyweight had only bristled with anger, and spiked the accusation by confessing about his injured shoulder, this awkward condition of affairs would not have existed. But the boy had simply shut his lips tightly, and looked at his big chum with a hurt light in his eyes, as if Stonewall had failed him. Since that day, the tackle could not bring himself to repeat the insult, until now, on the eve of the first crucial game, he had come to Pennyweight's room with the express purpose of taunting the little quarter-back and arousing his fighting spirit for the morrow. It was Coach Parker's mind, of course, that was directing the strategic campaign,

"Well," encouraged Payson, as the silence threat-

ened to grow embarrassing, "can we beat the State University?"

"I don't know," confessed Jackson, who was very ill at ease. "The team is a wonder, I hear. He just sweeps down the field—"

"He?" repeated Pennyweight, wrinkling his forehead. "I don't understand."

The tackle had found his opening, and he plunged into it as he was wont to tear into a gap on the football field.

"I mean Boomly, their right-guard," he explained, "It's a one-man team, you know. Every play is built around him, and they rely on him to break up the formations of their opponents. He's a wonder, they tell me; big, strong as an ox, quick to get going, and—well, I have heard that he's about as cold and cruel as they make them."

"Yes?" said the quarter-back, politely, but apparently without any emotion of interest or anticipation.

"He has a habit of breaking through the line and downing the quarter while he is passing the ball," Jackson explained. "Smith, of Hill College, told me

he literally crushed the courage out of their quarter-back, and left the kid whimpering and shaking with fright. That is why I suggested to Parker that—that—"

"Go on," said Payson, evenly, "I can guess what you're afraid to say."

"Well," Jackson blurted out desperately, "I suggested that perhaps a heavier quarter-back on our team, like Elton, might trouble him more than you could." He did not add that after he had spoken the rehearsed line to the coach, they had looked at each other, and laughed, and said in chorus, "Yes, Elton could—Not!"

"You mean," spoke Pennyweight slowly, "that you and the coach both doubt my nerve; that you both think I'll knuckle down to Boomly, or to anybody else. I suppose, then, I am not to have a chance to play?"

Jackson, suffering keenly with his friend, fought back a desire to shout at the top of his voice that of course Pennyweight would play, and that neither he nor the coach had ever thought any other way about

the matter. Before he answered he moistened his lips.

"You will go in as quarter when the game begins," he said, speaking in a voice that was surprisingly calm and even, considering the turmoil of his mind. "And Coach Parker says you can keep on playing to the end, if you don't—don't quit."

Young Payson stood up and held out his hand to the other. "Stonewall," he promised solemnly, with his lips very tight and his eyes a little hard, "I'll be playing right up to the final whistle. You can tell Coach Parker I said so, if you like."

Once outside the room, Jackson expelled his breath through whistling lips. "It's a mighty bitter medicine," he told himself, "but it's for his own good, and it's going to cure—it's going to cure!"

On the following day, a few minutes before time for the game to begin, Quarter-back Payson was whipping the team through a spirited signal practise that drove it up and down the field, when he heard the coach's quiet command, "That will do!" For a minute his heart seemed to stop beating. Was Parker going to substitute Elton at the last moment?

But the man's action was due to an entirely different reason. When the team had walked to his side, he pointed out the other eleven, still busily engaged in its preliminary preparation for the struggle that was to come.

"Boys," said he, "I want you to watch them for a moment. Study in particular the manner in which their right-guard, Boomly, crouches, springs, braces, and works his way into every play. If you can stop him, you can beat him—and he doesn't look invincible, does he?"

He did not. Jackson admitted to himself that the player was probably larger, and even stronger, than he was himself. But he appeared anything than the savage demon he had expected to see. Why, if Pennyweight played as he could—and would now—the victory was assured.

Promptly at three the game began. One of the officials flipped a silver coin high in the air, and Jackson contentedly grinned when he saw that his captain had won the toss. It was a harbinger of good luck.

The visitors were to kick off. While their long-

legged half-back was building a little hill of dirt for the ball to rest upon, Parker's team scattered to its proper defensive positions. Then an official asked if they were ready, and waited a moment for any dissenting voice. None came. He lifted a whistle to his lips, and blew shrilly. The game was on.

The kick was very poor. It sent the ball low and to one side, into the very hands of the astonished Jackson, who had been preparing to jostle off tackles and protect somebody back of him. But he did not fumble. He caught it cleanly with his arms, and tucked one end into the pit beneath his shoulder, with his hand on the other point, and his biceps pressing hard against the leather. No power on earth could dislodge it now. Then he lowered his head, not waiting for any interference to form, and plunged forward.

At the conclusion of a lumbering run of perhaps ten yards, the whole world seemed to come to an end. Something—somebody—hit his body a blow that felled him instantly; tentacles of steel clasped his legs just above the knees, and held him powerless to move. Presently, when his mind was finding order in the

midst of the chaos, he discovered that he had gone down before the tackling of Boomly, right-guard on the opposing team.

Even before the giant player was piling off, Jackson heard the shrill voice of Pennyweight calling them to line up. As soon as he could, he scrambled to his feet, and found his place. For a long second, he feared he might detect some sign of nervousness in the voice that was to give the signals. But presently it came with a sharp, clear, unwavering distinctness that made the tackle grin with delight. Why, Pennyweight was as sure of himself as anybody could be.

The first play was full-back over left-tackle. As Payson stooped for the ball, his whole line sagged suddenly toward him, and gave way between guard and center. Through the gap plowed Boomly, his face alight with the eager call of battle, and his arms sweeping aside the defense as one might part tall spears of wheat in walking through a field. There followed an instant of utter confusion; then the two teams were caught in the swirl of a great vortex, under which must be some player with the ball.

At the very bottom of the pile was Pennyweight, with his little body curled snugly about the pigskin; and sprawled over him was Boomly, smiling happily over the play that he had broken up. At his very side lay Jackson, his hand bleeding slightly.

"It's nothing," he said brusquely, when little Payson would have questioned him. "Look out for yourself." But his gaze never left the face of the right-guard on the other team.

It was first down again after the next play. The third dragged, thanks to a bull rush of Boomly's, and there was no gain. Then Pennyweight's clear voice rattled off four quick numbers, and the backs prepared for an end run. It was timed to a second, and behind splendid interference the runner advanced the the ball fifteen yards. For once, the big guard had not made his strength felt.

He rose to his feet back near the original line of scrimmage, with an expression of chagrin on his face. Somebody had shouldered him entirely out of the play at the very outset. That somebody had been big Jackson, who now lay still on the ground.

A dash of water put new life into him, however and he was on his feet in a second or two, none the worse for his encounter with Boomly. But the incident had shown what the others might expect if they set out to hamper the opposing guard.

Two minutes later, Payson himself collided with the giant, and went down underfoot in an instant. By the time Jackson had shaken himself free from two crazy tackles who imagined he had the ball, and had reached the group about the quater-back, who looked pitifully white and ridiculously frail as he lay on the grass, Pennyweight was just opening his eyes. Stonewall called for water, and dashed some in the boy's face.

"You'd better go out of the game for a while," he suggested.

Payson turned with a sound that might have been a snarl. A second later he was upon his feet.

"Line up," he yelled shrilly, running up to the ball. "Line up there, I say," Then he lowered his voice as Jackson asked him a question. "Yes, it was Boomly," he said. "He isn't a brute at heart, but he simply

goes crazy when the ball is in play. Why, once he begins to move, he doesn't know what he is doing at all."

The right-guard was, indeed, a foeman to fear. He seemed to lose all understanding when the ball was snapped, and his only aim was to reach it. He was a veritable maniac. Twice Jackson protested to the officials, and twice they claimed not to have seen any foul play.

It seemed, however, as the game progressed that Boomly and Jackson clashed in every scrimmage. It came to be a duel of strength and endurance and courage between them. At last, in spite of his will-power, Stonewall confessed that the other was getting on his nerves. Down in his heart was growing a dread of him. When the crazed guard trampled over him with brutish disregard of the pain he was inflicting, Jackson shuddered. It was like fighting a savage. Already he was sore and bruised, and in spite of his own magnificent phyisque rapidly tiring. But he only gritted his teeth and played the harder.

The first half ended without scoring on either side,

and the second seemed going the same way. Pennyweight Payson was dirt-begrimed, with scratches and cuts on his face; but his eyes were already shining with the new light of triumph, which marked his absolute conviction that he was not a coward, whatever the others might say. Jackson looked at him with the old worship in his glance, and the quarter-back, understanding the unspoken praise, blushed like a girl.

But there was something else he was learning. He was beginning to love the game, and to be eager for each scrimmage. The questioning of his bravery had accomplished the purpose of tossing him where the fight was the thickest and fiercest, and he had held his own, and had thrilled with the delight of it. After all, weight was not everything. And big Stonewall Jackson, hovering over him, read the boy's mind as if it had been an open book, and rejoiced in the midst of his own trouble.

Presently the captain asked how much time was left, and cried out in protest when the officials told him five minutes. Jackson himself was not sorry; for he was weary to the point of utter exhaustion, and not

at all sure of himself. He laughed grimly as he thought if there was a coward on the team it must be he himself and not the little quarter-back. As a matter of fact, his own heart was just as sturdy as it ever had been; but he had suffered from bruises and cuts and abrasions of the skin and blows on the head, body, and limbs, and shocks that had taken the very soul out of him, until now his dulled mind refused to spur him on.

Again they took time out for an injured player; again it was little Payson who had keeled over before the attack of that mighty guard. On the next play Jackson watched curiously to see if the boy would cringe from his enemy, and was glad when he did not, and a little puzzled, too. You see, Jackson was now too tired to think sanely himself.

The visiting team had the ball. Its next play began as an end run, and terminated as a wildly scrambled fumble back of the line. The ball hit the ground on one side of its pointed ends and bounded high in the air and far to one side.

With a cry that was half rage, half exultant hope,

Jackson leaped after it. Close at his heels was Pennyweight. It was only a forlorn hope that the next bound would not carry the ball yards away from them.

But the bounding of a football is without rule or reason, and, to his joyjul surprise, the pigskin leaped gently into Jackson's very arms.

A quick glance showed him a deserted field clear to the looming white goal-posts. Over to the left was a mass of struggling players, not yet aware of the fumble, or, at least, powerless to act rapidly enough to interfere. And ahead was a deserted field—no, not deserted either; for from the side, driving ahead like a great battering ram, came the other team's right-guard.

Jackson's heart seemed to stop beating. Instinctively he tucked the ball up under his left armpit, and raised his other hand to ward off the tackle. But even as he did it, he laughed hysterically at the thought of stopping Boomly with an open palm, as the rules required. The idea was absurd. He knew he could never pass that right-guard; knew it as surely as if he had already been tackled and thrown.

"All right, Stonewall," yelled a clear, unwavering

voice in his ear; "all right. I'll take him. Go it! It's a touchdown sure!"

A little form sprang ahead of the big tackle, and Jackson recognized Pennyweight. Somehow a great flood of confidence spread over him. He could make the touchdown if Pennyweight had the courage to clash once more, in a manner that threatened his every bone, with that demon of a right-guard.

Close behind the little quarter-back he ran, fearing lest at the end the boy should be the coward they had told him he was. But Pennyweight had tasted blood, and was athirst for more. The joy of the game was throbbing in his veins.

All at once Jackson saw the boy gather himself and literally plunge through the air at the man ahead. His hands were by his sides, and he made no effort to hold off the tackle foully. But his little body hit the right-guard squarely, like a cannon-ball out of the air; and the ponderous opponent gave way and fell, rolling over and over.

Jackson ran on. His dulled brain cleared suddenly, and with the fog went his fear. Pennyweight had done

this for him! Pennyweight, whom he had called a coward! But Jackson hadn't meant it; surely the boy must have sensed the strategy of the accusation. A great desire took hold of Stonewall to go back now and apologize to his friend for ever suggesting that he was lacking in courage.

Instead, of course, he raced forward, crossing the white lines of the field, one after another, until he had reached the last, upon which the goal posts reared themselves. Then he gently touched the ground with the ball.

Having scored a touchdown, he left the captain to kick goal, and ran back to where the little quarter-back had fallen. Pennyweight was sitting up, grinning broadly at the cheering mob in the grandstand, and nodding at the official who was announcing that time was up. When the boy saw Jackson, he grasped his big hand, pulled himself up by it, and danced wildly about the big tackle.

"You did it, Stonewall," he shrieked. "You did it! You won the game!"

Jackson held him off at arm's length.

"Why you little fool!" he said; "you little—you little nervy fool, you won it yourself!"

Then the coach came, and big Jackson grabbed him, and hauled him to the quarter-back's side.

"Now, Pennyweight," he said, "Parker's going to apologize for the little experiment we tried on you. If it wasn't right, you just say so, and I'll lick Parker, and get that big guard to lick me." And then they told him how they had tried to instill the love of the game in his heart.

Perhaps Pennyweight Payson understood only that they had never doubted him in the past; perhaps he still thrilled with the fighting instinct of a few minutes before. At any rate, he merely said,

"I'm glad you did it."

CHAPTER FIVE

A CHALLENGE FROM THE CHAMPIONS

COACH PARKER smoothed out the creases in the official letter a little nervously, and looked up at the captain of his team.

"You know, Williams, how I feel about this," he said, slowly.

The big right half-back straightened his ponderous shoulders and eyed the coach keenly.

"Certainly, Parker, and you've a right to feel that way, too, only—"

"Only what?" snapped the coach.

"Only we must play them. We can't ignore this challenge. Either we play them, or we admit they are the better team—that's what the public will say."

"I know it," agreed Parker, disconsolately. He looked up at the pennant on the wall, and read the words: "Western Inter-Collegiate Champions." Then he said, slowly: "You're right, I suppose, Williams; we aren't really the champions unless we meet and defeat them. But I've always objected to post-season games. My team has done its best work; why, after we had toppled over the State University, the whole eleven worked their heads off to be in shape for the later struggles, and you know how we won them, right up to the very last, with never a defeat on our clean slate."

"But our record is no better than that of Cranford College," pointed out Williams, "and its eleven won the championship last season, so I suppose its claim is sounder than ours. It seems a pity our schedule did

not call for a game with Cranford this year. But now—"

"I suppose," interrupted Coach Parker, "that you look upon this challenge as an opportunity. Well, in one sense, it is. It paves the way for a game with the only team that can rightfully dispute our title. But—"

"Well?"

Parker turned and stared silently out of the window. Just above his eyes, his brows puckered into two little wrinkles.

"It's Pennyweight Payson at quarter and Stonewall Jackson at tackle," he said presently. "I'm not sure of them."

"Not sure of them?" repeated Williams, profoundly astonished. "Why, I don't understand."

The coach raised a protesting hand. "Oh, I don't mean that I have failed to appreciate what they have done for the team. Why, Williams, they have been a host in themselves. Without them, we should have lost a number of games. But because they have both played so hard, with heart, soul and body, they have weakened themselves. Poor little Pennyweight has

lost so much weight that he is a mere shadow of his former self; he's kept going on clean grit. And Jackson is—well, I may confess to you, as his captain, that he is going stale; I discovered it in the last game. Those are my reasons for hesitating about accepting this challenge. If we do play Cranford, they will both give their best; but I am not sure their best will be enough."

"Thank you," said Williams, quietly. "I understand your position better than I did. Suppose I have a talk with them before we send our answer."

"Why, yes, do." agreed Parker. "And mind you, Williams, if you decide we should play the game, I'll work my head off to aid in securing the victory."

There, for the time, the matter rested. Williams hunted out the two players under discussion, and found them eager for another struggle. It is probable that neither of them appreciated that the long, nerve-racking, tempestuous season had demanded its heavy toll. At any rate, their honest enthusiasm was the final torch to Williams' ambition, firing it until the captain himself saw only success in its flames. When

he reported to Parker that his vote must be to accept the challenge, the coach smiled a little grimly, recalling the impetuosity of his own playing days; and accepted the inevitable.

The public announcement that the team was to play a post-season game with Cranford threw the college world into a frenzy of excitement. During the few days of practise before the contest, the side lines were black with ardent rooters, cheering and praising indiscriminately, and blindly arguing that there could be but one result. Even the grave faces of Coach Parker and Captain Williams failed to teach them the gravity of the situation.

On the night before the championship game, there was a gigantic mass meeting. New football words were fitted to old tunes, and sung by thousands of earnest rehearsers for the morrow. Cheer leaders were appointed, and practised until the very rafters rang with the staccato college yell. And last, after short talks of a prosy nature by the professors and university officials, the players themselves were introduced, and climbed embarrassedly to the platform, and, according

to their oratorical abilities, declaimed eloquently on the crises of the game, or mumbled a few incoherent promises to win or die fighting.

Then the great crowd arose, and a megaphone voice asked what was the matter with the team, to the deafening response that it was all right. Finally, with a last yell for good measure, which emptied the hall of its flushed-cheeked, sparkling-eyed students, the meeting came to an end. It was an occasion such as the old college had never known before.

The following morning dawned clear, with just enough coolness in the air to make it ideal football weather. With the sunrise came a transformation of the quiet little city into a chaotic background of color and clamor. Pennants waved from every house; street cars were draped with the college hues. Even the national flag fluttered forth from the houses of some who considered the game of world-wide importance. Bands, afoot and on gayly bedecked wagons, blared stridently. Whistles and rattles, bells and tin horns vied with one another for din supremacy. It was the city's greatest holiday.

Sedate old gentlemen from other towns dropped lightly from the incoming trains, and dodged or welcomed with unfaltering argument the adherents of the opposing team. At the principal hotels, the lobby was a vortex of shouting, smiling, disagreeing rooters of the two elevens, who grew purple in the face and angry of gesture and speech over their respective claims of superiority. It was a scene, withal, such as is never witnessed except in a college city on the day of a championship game.

Parker's team, clad in soiled football toggery that seemed strangely out of place amid the gaudy surroundings, rode early to the field in the antiquated bus which had carried other elevens for more years than any of them could recall. Already the vast park was well filled; and when the players trotted into the arena, headed by Coach Parker himself, the very heavens echoed back the Babel of cheer and yell and song.

Little Pennyweight Payson eyed the crowd with curiosity. On four sides, stretching skyward until all oustide objects were hidden from veiw, rose, row upon row, tier upon tier, of circus-like seats, their occu-

pants presenting a riot of color that moved incessantly in kaleidoscopic effect. The sight reminded the quarter-back of a great army of ants, glinting in the sunlight, and climbing the sides from the hole of the football gridiron. And constantly the swarm grew by hundreds and thousands. There was something fearful in the sight; it confused and irritated Payson, and forced upon him the knowledge that of late his nerves had been rasping him. Even the preliminary practise of running off plays did not lift his pall of dread and unreality.

Conscious only of the buzzing, vibrating crowd, and of the curious lack of confidence on his own part, Pennyweight learned presently that the flip of the coin had decided they were to kick off to Cranford. This was cheering news; for a fear had been welling in his heart that the initial flight of the pigskin would carry it straight to him, and that in the first grip of nervous awkwardness he might fumble. Now that this hideous nightmare could not materialize, he began to breathe easier.

The teams lined up. Williams, who was to kick,

built little terraces for the ball, reshaped them, swept them into annihilation, and began all over again. Payson wondered why the man should act like a fussy old woman, not realizing that even the oldest veterans were liable to be affected by the preying tension at the outset.

Of a sudden the crowd went quiet. The noise had been bad enough, but this absolute silence was a thousand times worse. Pennyweight's pulse quickened without reason, and his face began to burn. Would they never begin to play?

Just when the waiting was becoming unbearable, a whistle blasted shrilly, and loosened his taut nerves. Even as he caught the plump of Williams' boot against the ball, he found himself racing down the field.

But something was the matter with his stride, and he laughed a little shame-facedly when he discovered that he was trying to step carefully over the white lines that ran from side to side of the parallelogram. At the first glimpse they had seemed high barriers of some kind. Now he stamped flatly upon the next, and

grinned as a little mist of white powder rose protestingly.

Straight ahead three runners, looking like giants in their padded suits, were charging upon him. Instinctively he realized that one of them must have the ball; presently, indeed, he saw the fellow, with the point of the pigskin nestling in his armpit. Grady tried for him, but was brushed aside by the interference. Payson must down him.

The boy shivered a little uncertainly. The runner must weigh two hundred pounds or more, and the force of his impetus, when tackled, would be frightful. But Pennyweight never faltered. His mind told him his duty, and engulfed his doubts. With a little cry of rage at the temptation that had warned him to quit, he launched himself straight at the man's knees, caught him, hung desperately for a second, and was shaken off like a rat. A month ago he could have downed the man. But in those last gruelling weeks, his weight and strength had both ebbed. For the first time he realized that he was not the player he had been; that he was going stale.

To be sure Williams downed the runner a few feet beyond, but Payson knew that he himself had failed on his first opportunity. The realization was not calculated to inspire self-reliance.

Almost before he comprehended that the game was on, they were ready for the first scrimmage. He was playing close behind the line; for Parker feared to trust him in the back field. The boy had just time for a word of encouragement to Jackson before he saw the other eleven already in action. The attack was a cross-buck toward the left side, and crumpled into nothingness when it met Stonewall. Then came a tentative attempt on the opposite wing of the line, with a gain of only a yard or two, followed by a long punt.

Grady, playing back, ran the ball to the thirty-yard line before he was downed. Peters, the ponderous center-rush, took it jealously from the official who marked its final resting place, and straddled it, leaning forward. Behind him waited Pennyweight, nervous and uncertain. He was now facing the crucial test of his football career.

From the stands welled the college yell, over and over and over. Megaphones implored; parodies of the day's popular songs floated out to the players; bass voices boomed encouragement; shrill cries echoed the hope and confidence. The crowd was building high upon the team's offense.

As he rattled off the signal, the little quarter-back's voice trembled in spite of himself; but he caught the ball deftly, and passed it to the runner without a hitch. fitting into the quickly formed interference as accurately as he had in other games. The play was a line plunge, and the runner found a huge gap where Jackson had been facing the crowding enemy a moment before.

Payson felt himself swallowed by a great swirl of players, that eddied a moment here and there and then sank to the ground with remorseless determination. As a knee lifted from his face, he heard the welcome cry:

"Second down; two yards to go!"

They had made a clean gain on the first scrimmage. The boy scrambled exultantly to his feet.

"Good old Stonewall!" he said to the impassive left-tackle. Then, "Line up fellows—hustle! Seven—four—eleven!"

And the next play was on.

They went twenty yards in three downs, crashing into the opposing line like a great battering ram. In the first false stimulus of the struggle, Jackson was playing with the strength of a demon, bowling over his man and tearing the defense to nothingness, just as he had done in the lesser games. Even when the Cranford captain propped his wavering right-tackle by throwing the full-back directly behind him, he did not stop the blond giant.

"They're playing two men against you, Stonewall!" cried little Payson, "but you can handle them both."

It there had been a doubt in the big man's mind, his friend's faith in him killed it instantly. He never wavered against the onslaught.

Little Pennyweight kept his team working at the last notch of its speed and power. He himself was playing in a blind frenzy of the intoxication of the moment, and gave little heed to the future. Results

counted; and as each down brought them nearer the white line that marked the goal, he forgot everything save the imminent touchdown.

On the opponent's twenty-yard line, the visitors braced, as a strong team will when it is driven into a corner. A gain of four yards trickled through them once, twice—and then they held!

Already the over-trained team behind Pennyweight Payson was beginning to tire under the strain. Their plunges started more deliberately, and lacked their former terrors. Even Stonewall Jackson could not guide them to successful issues. And when the Cranford eleven, fighting in the last ditch, rose to the challenge like the mighty machine it was, the onrushing formation faltered and broke, and was crushed back on the last down. It was Cranford's ball at its very goal line.

The repulse when the score had seemed so certain cut into Pennyweight's heart like a knife. Even Jackson caught the note of grief on the quarter-back's face.

"Next time," grunted the tackle. "We'll go over the next time, Pennyweight."

Cranford kicked out of danger, far up the field, and once more little Payson resumed the gruelling task of forcing the visitors back to their goal. But this time a fumble near the middle of the field cut short the march before it was fairly begun. At the whistle ending the first quarter, the ball was on the fifty-five yard line.

The three minutes of rest proved a balm for weary limbs and wavering hearts. When they went back into the struggle, each player carried with him a new determination to accomplish what had hitherto proved the impossible.

None of them played as hard as Jackson. He fought as if life or death hung upon each down, and it was largely his wonderful defensive work that finally checked the enemy's onslaught. But the Herculean efforts began to have their effect, and even the crowds in the stands could see he was tiring. Payson's entreaties aroused him at times, but much of the old fire and vigor seemed missing. For Stonewall Jackson was glutted with football; he had gone stale, just as Parker knew he would.

Gradually, but with horrible clearness to Payson,

Cranford began to take command of the situation. When the whistle ended the first half, without a score on either side, it sounded in Pennyweight's ears like a pean of thanksgiving. Of the coming thirty minutes of play he hardly dared to think. Defeat was staring them in the face.

CHAPTER SIX

IN THE LAST QUARTER

AS the teams left the field for the intermission between halves, Pennyweight Payson marched straight to his coach. In those last few minutes of defensive play, an analysis of his ability to aid his eleven had forced him to conclude that he was practically a worthless cog of the great machine. Playing

back, his lack of weight paved the way for missed tackles; playing close in, it failed to bolster the assaulted line.

"Mr. Parker," he began, "I—I have been doing my best, but it has not been good enough. I have staled off and lost weight. Perhaps you can get better and more telling results by playing Elton at quarter. His advantage in weight might be a big factor."

For several seconds the coach looked at Pennyweight without speaking. Then he said succinctly, "Have you given up?"

"Oh, no, sir!" said the boy, so quickly and so sharply that Parker felt rebuked. "If you say so, I'll fight it out to the end; but we must win, sir—the old college must win, I want to play; it would break my heart if I quit. But I'd a heap rather the team won; you know that, sir. And now that both teams are a little tired, and are playing old-fashioned football, Elton's weight would count."

Coach Parker had been fighting this same problem with himself. There was no need of further argument.

"If you go out," he explained wearily, "Jackson

will be lost. He's over-trained as much as you, and I am counting on your aid in keeping him playing at top speed. If the worst happens, he must be made to play beyond his normal speed; and he won't do that unless you urge him to it. We may win yet," he added. But there was no hope in his voice.

In the dressing room there was grim silence. Minor cuts were patched up, sore legs and arms massaged, and plans of campaign discussed. Coach Parker had little to say, but when he spoke it was to encourage rather than to condemn. Little Payson sat near Jackson, telling him over and over that they must win. The big tackle, already bruised and sore, forgot his hurts, and nodded gravely. If Pennyweight said they must win, they would. His was the last word on the outcome of the game.

But when play was resumed, it was proved, as it has been since ambition first fired the hearts of men, that the body can not accomplish all the mind commands. In that third quarter, although they fought as a football team facing defeat never fought before or since, it presently became obvious, even to the

sobering maniacs in the grandstands and bleachers, that the visitors were gradually assuming the upper hand. For ten minutes they staved off the inevitable, and then, crushed and fighting to the last ditch, fell back sullenly to their very goal line, held desperately for one down, and then gave way for the touchdown. A neat goal made the score 6 to 0 in Cranford's favor.

To Payson it was an excruciating torture. Time after time he flung his one hundred odd pounds full against the line the other team was forcing back, and cried in rage at his puny strength. Elton weighed one hundred and fifty, and was more muscular, and was not stale with the season's grind of games; but Elton had never inspired Jackson! The big tackle was playing hard, but Pennyweight felt there must still be more strength reserved in that great hulk.

When the last quarter began, Williams kicked off. The brief respite had proved a buoying tonic, and Cranford found the line firm and unyielding. When the downs brought no gains, its captain dropped back to punt. The play was obvious, and Payson began to race back to ward tacklers from Grady. But a cry

made him turn quickly, and swerve like a hawk to the left. Jackson had broken through the line and had blocked the kick. The ball hit his hand, and instead of soaring up into the sky and far down the field, it caromed off to one side.

By a desperate sprint, Pennyweight swooped down upon it, plunged madly toward the wriggling leather, turned a complete somersault, and came to his feet with the ball in his arms. With a free running field before him, he carried it twenty yards nearer the goal before he was tackled. As he fell, an elbow crashed into his face, and he emerged bleeding freely.

Jackson stopped short at sight of him, his face that of a madman. Deep down in his heart he growled like a beat of the untreked forests.

The ball was on Cranford's thirty-yard line. After Payson's face had been sponged, with the tackle hovering near and muttering, the boy went back to his position, eager to push the advantage. But twice he sent plays catapulting against the visitors' line, and twice they failed of advance. Jackson's mind seemed to turn more upon his friend's injury than upon the

game itself, and he failed to lend his customary aid. Pennyweight groaned his disappointment.

There was one chance—a goal from the field. Williams must do it. There was no need of concealing the play that was to be attempted, and the boy spoke a cheery word of encouragement to his captain.

"You can do it, old man," he declared, confidently. "Take your time; we'll hold them back."

Something of the inspiration with which the boy was wont to fire Jackson took possession of Williams. He shut his lips tightly, and nodded an appreciation. Then he raced back to his position behind the line, opened his hands with a snap for the ball, and drop-kicked a perfect goal. The score was now 6 to 3.

But the game was not yet won, nor the score tied. Down in his heart, Pennyweight was losing hope. He had no confidence in his own ability, despite the fact that he had been instrumental in making possible the first points; and, far worse, he was weakening in his hold upon Jackson, who was steadily growing more sluggish and stolid. Galled but not checked by the odds against him, the little quarter-back himself was

fighting on with the grim fury of a cornered beast of prey.

In one of the scrimmages, an elbow crashed into his face again. A minute later it happened for the third time—and it was not an accident! Payson laughed hysterically.

"The fools!" he muttered. "They are trying to lay me out—poor weak me! The fools! Are they blind?" And, with the blood oozing from an open cut in his cheek, he again laughed wildly.

But Jackson did not laugh. The big tackle was opening and closing his great hairy hands with the slow-kindling, but awful, anger of his kind. Somebody on the other team was "laying for " Payson—for Pennyweight! But, try as he might, he could not discover the culprit.

Then it happened. Fifteen players piled high in a heap, following a fumble; and a cry of pain came from the depths of the human avalanche. When they all rolled off, it was seen that Pennyweight Payson had lain undermost, curled about the ball. At first he appeared uninjured, save for a fresh abrasion on his

face, and began to rise. As he did so, he caught the insane glint in Jackson's eyes, at once compassionate and vengeful. With a little inarticulate moan, the boy sank back.

The crowd hused in awe. A trainer, with a pail and sponge, rushed out from the side lines. A doctor followed.

"I—I'm hurt," cried Payson, pitifully. "Carry me me off the field, somebody. Jackson, you do it."

As tenderly as a woman lifts a baby, the gaint tackle knelt and took Pennyweight in his arms. Slowly and with infinite care, he walked toward the side lines with his burden. His great body was twitching spasmodically, and his face was drawn and black with rage.

"Who did it, Pennyweight?" he demanded hoarsely. "I'll get him, boy; as sure as I go back out there, I'll get him."

"I don't know who it was, Stonewall," whispered the quarter-back. "It was more than one of them."

"Then I'll get the whole team," rumbled Jackson. "I'll pick them out one by one and—"

"Listen," interrupted Payson, "There's just one

thing that will revenge, just one thing that will pay the debt. Beat them! Score on them! Why, Stonewall, a defeat now would be worse than any injury or insult you could fling at them."

"I'll get them," Jackson responded stubbornly. The veins in his neck were big and purple.

"For me, Stonewall, win from them! Push them off their feet! Plow over them, under them, through them! Never stop! Win, Stonewall; win! For me, old man! Promise!"

"I promise, Pennyweight. We will win!"

The words were chopped off like bits of rock, but Payson was satisfied. When the coach came to his side, the quarter-back waved him away.

"Not much hurt," he declared shortly. "Just inspiring old Stonewall to play beyond his normal speed and power. Remember Boomly, of the State U.? Well, you'll see Stonewall put his playing to shame."

Jackson went back into the game metamorphosed. No longer was there a friendly football team opposing him. No longer was he a mere cog in a machine. He

The giant tackle knelt and took Pennyweight in his arms.—Page 97

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was vengeance personified, sworn not to maim or kill, but to humiliate.

Elton went in as quarter-back, fresh, clear-headed, and far from stale. Something in the terrible aspect of the big tackle gave him an inkling of the situation.

"All right, fellows," he said, taking command. "Line up! Six—eight—four. You've got it, Jackson, Go through!"

Jackson went. A battering ram crashed against the left wing of the opposing line. A man,—nay a devil—charged toward it, upon it, through it. As he fought his way, he snarled and laughed by turns. He was a veritable maniac unloosed. No one tackler—no two—no three could stop him. When he did fall, literally crushed by the weight of nearly the whole enemy, he had made a clean gain of ten yards.

Growling gutturally to himself, with set jaw and jerking fingers, he took his place in the line. The next play was through his territory; and, lowering his head he bellowed and charged like a mad bull. The opposing tackle was a blade of grass in the path of a cyclone, but when he fell Jackson stamped over him, and on—

on toward those others, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, feeling nothing, knowing only that a voice was crying within him, "Plow over them, under them, through them! Win, Stonewall; win for me!"

They complained to the officials that he was fouling. But he was not. He was simply playing the game as his stout heart willed, totally ignoring the petty hindrances of human brawn. He was a brute, a primitive man, a vengeance-mad creature of inspiration. As well try to stop a locomotive with the lever wide!

In every play he figured. Sometimes he took the ball, circling back and crashing through the other half of the line, and beyond—always beyond; and sometimes he lowered his head, shouting insanely through clenched teeth, and cut a path for the runner as cleanly as a scythe might have done. When they tried to stop him, they were shaken off, and flung for yards or went to the ground, bowing down before his abnormal fury and strength. He was a grim and a mighty avenger.

For the first time in the history of Cranford College

its team became utterly demoralized. It was not a human they were fighting, but a terrible wild animal, with the strength of a dozen men. It had no feelings of its own, and was safe from harm and hurt. It was well-nigh resistless. It met squarely those who made any attempt to block it, and never faltered at the contact. And as it cut and hewed its way through the other eleven, it gloated aloud, hair aflaunt, face torn and bleeding, and eyes that were seeing only an injured friend.

Jackson was fighting for the vengeance of victory as some distant ancestor must have fought daily for the godsend of life itself.

There could be but one result. Just as the official announced that there were only five minutes to play, the mad tackle carried the ball across the line for a touchdown, and chafed openly because of the time lost in kicking the goal. He was aflame for further battle. Perhaps Pennywight was not yet satisfied.

One minute before time was called, he did it again, covering the last few yards with nearly the whole of the opposing eleven striving helplessly to pull him

down or back. The score was now 6 to 15, and Cranford was certainly defeated.

When it was all over, he cried at the lost opportunity of continuing until he dropped from sheer exhaustion. He did not hear the mighty cheers, nor see the men who swarmed around him with fulsome praise, nor know what they were saying. He wanted Payson.

At last he found him, still in his football suit, and looking little the worse for his injury. As he planted himself before the boy, the wild, vengeful expression gradually softened, and before Pennyweight could speak, the big tackle was smiling broadly.

"Good old Stonewall!" choked the little quarter-back, wringing his hand, "Good old Stonewall! You won the game—and the championship. Didn't I tell you, Parker, that he'd develop into the best tackle the old college ever knew?"

Jackson looked the boy over with critical eyes, beginning to understand his sacrifice.

"You weren't hurt much?" he said, slowly.

"Why, no-o, not much," confessed little Payson, grinning embarrassedly.

"It strikes me," said Jackson, "that you were really the one who won the game and the championship. Didn't I tell you, Parker, that he'd develop into the best and brainiest quarter-back the old college ever knew?"

"I think," objected Coach Parker, speaking a little flippantly, to hide the emotions he did not care to display before the crowd, "that each of you said the other would develop into the best player the old college ever knew. Well, there can't be *two* best!"

Midget Blake, Pitcher

Like a flash the first baseman swooped down upon the ball.—Page 118

CHAPTER ONE

"IF you please, sir, I should like a chance to pitch a few balls." Big Kling, the baseball coach, turned slowly and faced the boy who had spoken to him.

"Oh! you do?" he said, with just a tinge of sarcasm in his voice. "What do they call you?"

"Midget" explained the boy, so embarrassed for the moment that he did not realize that the coach wanted his real name. "That is, Frank Blake."

The coach smiled. Beneath his great hulking frame

he had a very kind heart—and the college needed pitchers sorely.

"All right, Midget," he encouraged; "throw off your coat and come in here."

He lifted the net, and the boy stepped into the base-ball "cage." It was on the top floor of the college gymnasium, and almost as light as out doors. A great net, like a loosely spun hammock, covered three sides of the immense room. The fourth was a white canvas curtain, with two parallelograms painted upon it in black. Towards these two young fellows were pitching balls.

"Ever pitch inside?" asked Coach Kling. The boy was so obviously a Freshman that the question was only natural.

"No," confessed the boy.

"Well," explained Kling, "each of those parallelograms represents the limits of a strike. They are as high as a man's shoulders and as low as his knees and as wide as the home plate. Put the ball anywhere inside the lines and you've got a strike. I presume you've pitched a little on your high school team."

Now, The Midget, as he was nicknamed, had been instrumental in winning the State high school championship for his nine, but he did not tell the coach this. There was a vast difference between a high school and a college, as the boy was beginning to understand, and, besides, he was too modest to talk about himself. So he merely nodded his head.

The coach waved aside one of the other pitchers, and tossed the boy a spotless white ball. The Midget caught it deftly, and closed his long fingers caressingly about it. Then he stepped into position, and eyed the black marks on the curtain for a full minute.

He threw a fast straight ball that caught the canvas fairly in the middle of the parallelogram. The coach's eyes opened wide with appreciation of the quick snap of the arm and of the accurate throw.

The Midget smiled a little, and threw an inshoot and then an out. He sent over a fast ball and then a tantalizing slow one. And once, just as the last, he moistened the sphere slightly and looked at the coach inquiringly.

Kling was smiling a little derisively as the boy drew

back his arm. No college pitcher had ever mastered the "spit" ball. But as he watched the throw, and saw the sudden break, perhaps six feet from the canvas, he stopped smiling, very suddenly, and a new light came into his eyes. The pitch had gone a little wide, but the boy had thrown a "spit" ball wonderfully well for the first trial—and very few batters can hit a pitch in which the ball breaks suddenly from its path, owing to a partially wet surface, before it crosses the plate.

That night Coach Kling, the baseball Czar of the college, and Midget Blake, the Freshman, went home arm in arm, so engrossed in their talk that several upper-class men, who spoke to the big coach, felt snubbed when he failed to respond to their greetings. And the next day, when the college met the local high school team for the first practise game, Midget Blake was in the pitcher's box.

Some of the high school boys had played against the youngster the year before, and smiled hopefully. They had never beaten the big men in a regular game, but each year they went into the fray with hopes high.

This time, with one of the little pitchers of another high school pitted against them at the outset, they determined to begin by making a safe margin of runs to offset the pitching of any other man whom Coach Kling might put against them.

The Midget was nervous. Down where his heart should have been, there seemed to be an engine—pumping, jumping, throbbing. The distance between him and the batter looked twice as far as the rules prescribed. Away off at the end of it the home plate, neatly brushed, sparkled at him like a little white star.

He decided to throw a straight ball to make sure of his aim. It went cleanly toward the middle of the plate, but the batter caught it fairly on the end of his stick, and it sailed far over The Midget's head for a two-base hit. The next batter sent a sizzling grounder at the short-stop, and made his base on the ragged fielding.

The Midget gritted his teeth. The few spectators were very still, waiting for the next play, and a little sorry for the pink-cheeked boy in the box. Somehow or other, though, he felt cold all at once and found he

was shaking. But for all that he had calmed wonderfully. Now he could see the plate clearly, and confidence in his ability to pitch grew in his heart. He threw an out-curve that started straight for the plate, and then swerved away from the batter, who missed it by six inches. Another, in exactly the same place, made two strikes. The catcher grinned, and signaled for a third.

For a moment The Midget hesitated. By this time the batter would realize his error in striking at balls that went wide.—"At balls that went wide,"—the words lingered in the boy's brain after the thought had come and gone. There was the opportunity; the ball must not go wide. He threw it straight at the batter, and when the player had jumped back suddenly, the ball curved gracefully out over the middle of the plate.

The next batter popped up a little fly to first, and The Midget began to grow confident—far too confident. He shot over a stinging in-curve, and the batter met it squarely for a long hit over the center fielder's head. By this time the ball was returned, two runners had scored, and another rested on third, puffing audi-

bly from his long run, but smiling in a superior way that cut straight into The Midget's heart.

It was the tonic needed, however, and the next batter lunged fearfully at the first three strikes, and ignominiously struck out.

The runs were small matters of themselves, as the high school boys would of course be no match for the college team. But a triple and a double inning did not speak well for the Midget's ability to pitch strongly under fire. The boy knew it himself, and when Kling came over to suggest that he give way to another pitcher, who was to be tried out, the appealing look in the boy's blue eyes made him change his mind. At best it was only a practise game, and the Midget had struck out two men in a single inning. So he made some common-place remark, and added a word of cheer that made the little fellow's face grow rosy with pleasure.

As the game progressed the high school team proved more and more of a surprise. It had been practising for weeks with the sole idea of beating the college nine, which was just finding the proper men for its positions. Not only that, but the school pitcher proved some-

thing of a genius. At the end of the third inning the score showed that the college had but three runs to two of the other nine.

The Midget hit the first batter in the fourth, and the fellow walked to first, ostentatiously rubbing his arm, which the ball had merely grazed. The second batter drove a hot grounder into the third baseman's hands, and the latter promptly overthrew first by ten feet. The runners advanced to second and third. The next rapped out a clean single, and the bases were full, with nobody out.

The Midget faced a crisis, and knew it. He took the ball gingerly when it was returned to him from the field, and turned it over and over. Then he rubbed a little dirt on his hand, to overcome the perspiration that dampened it. The batter was the pitcher of the other team and had fanned the last time, but the Midget took no chances. The first ball was a sharp in-shoot that cut the plate, even while the batter was sneering at the wide throw. The second was a fast straight ball that was in the catcher's hands before the swinging bat was over the plate. Two more "coaxers" whistled

past just far enough out to be called balls. Then, The Midget drew back his arm, as if to deliver a fast straight one again, and threw it so slowly that the batter lunged forward and lost his balance in an effort to meet it. One man was out.

The next player headed the batting list, and had already lined out a single in addition to the double at the outset. The Midget shut his teeth with a determined snap, and looked the fellow over carefully. Suddenly, without the usual swing of his arm, he sent in a fast straight ball that came so unexpectedly that one strike had been called before the batter appreciated the situation. The boy saw the fellow's jaw go forward and his hand clench on the bat. He meant to hit the ball, and to hit it hard.

An in-curve, that barely sailed over the corner of the plate, was called a second strike. The catcher nodded his head approvingly, and off on the side-lines Coach Kling squatted down with a grunt of satisfaction. He saw The Midget shake his head at every signal the catcher made until the two met on the diamond and exchanged a few words. Then The Midget, smil-

ing a little, carried his gloved left hand to his mouth as a shield for his right and the ball, and the coach knew he was going to try the "spit" ball.

The pitch began as if it were to cut the plate without a curve, and the batter drew back expectantly. At the very moment he swung, however, he saw the ball jerk suddenly, and in spite of himself the bat missed it by three inches. It was the first spit ball ever pitched to him, and he walked away from the base with a startled look on his face. The Midget was grinning cheerfully.

The next batter was the second on the list, and was considered a sure hitter. He made the mistake, however, of swinging too hard, of being too anxious, and missed cleanly the first two strikes. Then he slipped up his hand suddenly, holding the bat loosely, and bunted down the first base line.

Like a flash the first baseman swooped down upon the ball. The Midget hesitated just an instant, confused, before his brain cleared. Then he raced for the base, and took the throw neatly. The batter was out, and the side was retired.

The blow landed fairly on the drowning man's chin.—Page 134

Over on the side-lines they cheered him noisily when he came in from the field. Coach Kling met him.

"All right, Midget," he said, quietly. "You may run into the gymnasium now, and I'll try out some of the other pitchers. I'm glad I left you in long enough to test your mettle."

"Thank you, sir," said The Midget, very meekly, as if he had done nothing at all wonderful. "Thank you, sir," he repeated, and raced toward the "gym."

He had taken a hot shower and then an icy cold one, and was dressing when the team came in. The final score had been twelve to five in favor of the college boys, and the Midget felt a queer little thrill of pride that his work had been instrumental in winning. It was the first time he had seemed to be a part of the college.

One of the fellows came round to his locker, and he recognized Carper, another of the pitchers.

"Ah! that you, Blake?" greeted the latter. "Well, you got out of it luckier than I did; they made three runs in the three innings I pitched."

It wasn't luck. The Midget knew that. But he was no cad, and he only said quietly, "That's too bad, Carper."

"It was," agreed the other, ruefully, "I wanted to make a good record this year, too. I won seven out of ten games I pitched last season, and I'm going to do a lot better this time."

The Midget was so modest himself that he hardly knew how to meet this egotistical young man. He ventured the remark that Carper must have done a lot for the old college, and was surprised to see the other sneer openly.

"Hang the college!" he exclaimed. "It's a reputation I'm looking for."

Before the boy could reply, Coach Kling came up. He had heard Carper's words, and as the fellow moved away he turned to Blake.

"Midget," he said kindly, with a gruffness to hide the sentiment, "don't go wrong! You're working for the old college, my boy; remember that. She's got a reputation to uphold, and we shall count on you to help. We want you to do it because you've got the

proper college spirit, too; because you'd slave for her rather than for your own glory. A man who can't forget himself isn't much good to a college."

"Yes, sir," said The Midget.

Kling looked at the boy's shining eyes silently. For a moment neither spoke. Then the coach held out his hand.

"You've got it," he declared, a little ambiguously. "You'll do! Practise at four to-morrow. Good night, Midget!"

"Good night," said The Midget, watching Kling's retreating form. Then he said to himself, as if he had discovered some new creation, "There's a man—a man without a college spirit."

The Courage of a Fighter

CHAPTER TWO

"CRACK!" The batter met the first ball The Midget pitched, and sent it sailing straight over the left-field fence for a home run. The two men on the bases trotted toward the plate leisurely. Out on the side lines the other coach jeered softly:

"Going up! Going up! Going up! Going! going! gone!"

It was the fourth hit in the sixth inning of the first crucial game. Already The Midget had been touched up safely a dozen times, with six runs as a result. Now

the score was 9 to 0, and the game was hopelessly lost.

The Midget wiped his damp forhead, and looked toward Coach Kling, over on the home players' bench. The big man nodded his head wearily, and the boy walked over toward him, batted out of the box in the first college game of the season!

He was breathing quickly when he reached the coach, and his eyes were half-closed and hard. For a moment Kling eyed him soberly. Then he spoke.

"What's the trouble, Midget? Bounder?"

Bounder was the catcher. The Midget jerked back his head suddenly, and the surprise in his eyes was too plain to escape Kling. The big man sighed wearily.

"Yes, I thought so," he said. "I've been watching him." He hesitated, and then said, a little abstractedly, "He and Carper are great friends, you know. I'd have taken him out long ago, but there's nobody else for back-stop."

As The Midget hurried to the gymnasium, his face burned with anger. He had pitched to the very best of his ability; he knew his curves were wide and his throws

accurate. Had it not been for Bounder, all would have been well.

The catcher had given all the signals. At the very first of the game, when he had ordered a low ball for a batter who seemed to find it the only thing he could hit, and a fast straight one for the crack slugger of the other team, which had resulted in long hits, the little pitcher had wondered at the seasoned catcher's lack of judgment. But when it had gone from bad to worse—when he found that Bounder was playing him deliberately into the hands of the opposing batters—a great anger surged up into his heart. At the last, when the cool, insolent catcher had smiled at Carper, on the bench, his passion overpowered him, and he grew wild, hitting batters, giving bases on balls, and pitching strikes that were turned into two and three base hits and even one home run.

Then Kling had taken him out of the game, and up in the grandstand they called him a quitter; told one another how he had failed to make good, how he had been batted all over the field. Only Kling had known; he was too much of a veteran not to understand.

As The Midget stood under the shower bath, he drew up his arms slowly, and watched the big muscles knot. He was proud of his development; it had meant years of steady exercise of all kinds. He had spent an hour each day in his high school gymnasium ever since he had graduated from the eighth grade. All the muscle-developing machines had been tried and tried again. He had wrestled assiduously, and even taken a course in boxing. His father had objected to his becoming a fighter, as he expressed it, particularly after the instructor had announced proudly that the boy could "lick anybody anywhere near his weight."

Instead of dressing, The Midget slipped into his gymnasium suit, and raced upstairs to the main floor. Off in the corner room, with the padded sides, a boxing instructor had just finished giving a hopeful but awkward student a lesson. His eyes kindled at the Midget's muscles.

"Box?" he asked, tersely.

The Midget nodded his head silently, and without invitation slipped on the gloves. He stepped into posi-

tion, throwing his left up to his face for guard and drawing his right close to his body, waiting.

The Midget never knew what the instructor thought of the "go." The boy only saw an imaginary Bounder in front of him, and he lunged and tapped and drove viciously out of pure joy of hitting the foe he wished was there. When the other's gloves found his face or body he only grinned cheerfully, and bore in himself. At the end of five minutes, both were breathing rapidly and perspiring. A little knot of students had gathered about them, and one was telling the others that the kid was "Midget,—Midget Blake, the Freshman pitcher."

After he had taken off the gloves, the instructor held out his hand.

"You're great," he exclaimed. "Let me take you in tow, and I'll make you a fighter."

The Midget shook his head. "Not that," he said. "I'm a boxer, that's all." And, without explanation, he trotted downstairs again. Just as he turned toward his locker, he came face to face with Bounder. In an instant all the old anger surged into his heart again.

He drew back his arm menacingly. The catcher was the heavier by far, but the boy was not afraid.

"Bounder," he said, with his teeth close together, "you threw the game to-day."

The other made a show of astonishment. "What do you mean?" he demanded.

"You know well enough," declared the Midget.

"You played me into the hands of the batters; you made me out a fool, a laughing stock, to every one of the spectators."

Bounder stepped back coolly. "Oh!" he sneered. "Excusing yourself that way after your miserable showing? What do you want to do anyhow? Fight?"

The Midget swallowed once, twice. Bounder had clenched his fists and was waiting. The other fellows on the team had gathered about. Of course the catcher was too heavy for the boy, they told one another, but the little pitcher was game.

The Midget thought of his boxing upstairs, of his ability to whip lightning blows upon a slow, heavy opponent. Down in his heart he was confident he could thrash the fellow within an inch of his life. But

the thought of his father's objection to fighting unless it was absolutely necessary came to his mind. He hesitated, and glanced around. The disapproving face of Coach Kling met his eye as he lowered the hand he had involuntarily thrown up.

"No," he said, slowly, "I don't want to fight."

For a long time the silence was painful. Presently some one coughed. Some one else only half smothered a remark that brought the blood to the Midget's face.

"You're wise," insulted Bounder, with a snarl that was meant for a laugh. "You haven't the strength in that baby pitching arm of yours to hit me hard enough to even leave a bruise."

The Midget's face went from crimson to white. For an instant it seemed he was about to break his resolution, and prove himself not a coward in the eyes of his fellows. But he turned quickly, and walked away. Only the boy himself and possibly big Kling, who was all-wise in the ways of athletes with real courage, understood that he had proved himself wonderfully brave.

As The Midget was tying his shoe-string, the big coach came to his side.

"Want to go on the lake?" he asked.

The boy looked up gratefully. "Thank you!" he said quickly, with a whole world of gratitude in his tone, "I should."

Kling unlocked the row-boat, and together they pushed it into the water. The big man put the boy in the stern, where he could face him, and then pulled slowly, but with tremendous strength, out from the boat-house toward the middle of the lake.

"We won't talk about it," said the coach, "because it won't help matters. I'm glad you had the courage not to fight, and I'm all the more glad because I had just been chatting with Moriarty, the boxing instructor, you know. What I do want to say, though, is that I've got hold of a new catcher, as clean-limbed and as solid a back-stop as you'd want. I'll use him when you pitch, and Carper and Bounder can work together. If it weren't absolutely necessary to use them, I'd drop both. You can't rely on—"

He stopped suddenly as he caught the quick change

on The Midget's face. While he talked the boat had been cutting through the water sharply, and the boy had been facing him. Now, as the little pitcher looked up, he caught sight of a canoe directly ahead, in the very act of being run down. And in the canoe sat Bounder, blissfully paddling straight ahead with a leisurely movement that scarcely carried the shell forward at all.

The Midget jumped to his feet and shouted. Bounder turned quicklv, and gave an agonized scream.

"Don't! don't!" he begged hysterically, waving the row-boat aside as if it were human. "Don't! For God's sake, don't! I can't swim a stroke! I—"

The heavy row-boat crashed into the frail canoe, and tore through it as if it had been paper. Bounder disappeared instantly. The shock, light as it was, was enough to over-balance Kling, who toppled out into the water. Only The Midget was left, standing there white and still.

But it was only for a second. Like a flash he had whipped off his coat and dived. Even as he went down he caught sight of Kling's face coming to the surface,

and of a great arm that quite naturally pulled a long overhand stroke toward the boat. Kling could swim, of course.

When The Midget came to the surface, the big coach was hanging to the side of the row-boat, shaking the water from his hair and eyes, and smiling cheerfully. The boat had drifted round enough to place him on the shore-side. Out further in the lake a head came to the surface for an instant, and then went down again. Kling had not realized that there might be anybody except The Midget and himself in the water.

The boy caught his stroke quickly, and swam out toward the spot where he had seen the head. He had forgotten his anger toward Bounder; he remembered only that he was in danger.

He reached the place at exactly the right instant. A tangle of black hair parted the water, and a frantic hand buried itself in the Midget's own hair. The boy reached up and tried to shake it off. As he did so, he felt himself drawn down under the water.

It was a desperate fight to regain the surface. When he did, he saw that Kling and the boat were even fur-

ther away than before. He shouted hoarsely, and in a second the big man was swimming toward him.

He was pulled under again, and when he reached the surface he saw that he must act quickly and decisively. Kling would not be able to reach him in time.

With a quick fling he turned over on his side, facing the frantic Bounder, and swinging his arm above the surface, brought his clenched fist against the other's face. The first blow failed of its purpose, and he swung again, bringing into play every ounce of muscle he could command. The blow landed fairly on the drowning man's chin.

With a quick, convulsive gasp, Bounder fell back into the water, from which he had seemed to rise partially by the aid of the hand on The Midget's head. He loosed his hold on the boy's hair, and turning on his face began to sink slowly. In an instant the boy had caught him and was easily supporting the dead weight, when the coach reached him.

With Kling's aid he towed him to the boat, and they worked over him vigorously and as scientifically as they could in the cramped quarters. A brisk rubbing, and

He plunged across the pasture to the woods.—Page 161

a massaging of the body over the lungs had the desired effect. Bounder opened his eyes wonderingly.

"Where am I?" he gasped. "What's happened?" He was touching his face and chin gingerly

"The Midget hit you," remarked the coach, with a chuckle,—"twice: once over the left eye, which is turning a beautiful black and blue; and once on the point of the chin, which scored the knock-out." It had been so near a tragedy that the big man could not trust himself to speak soberly.

"Oh!" said Bounder, bewildered. "Oh!" Then a hazy recollection of the accident came to him. "I was in the water," he shuddered, "drowning, and—and—"

"And The Midget, the youth who hasn't the strength in 'that baby pitching arm' to even leave a bruise, saved your life when you were pulling him and yourself to the bottom, by knocking you unconscious and then floating you." It was a long sentence for a big man, but there was exultation in his voice.

Bounder lay silent, shivering miserably and coughing. Kling picked up the oars and began rowing toward

shore. The Midget, embarrassed and shaking with fright and cold, now that it was all over, looked at the man on the bottom of the boat with a curious mixture of pity and contempt.

"Don't!" said Bounder, catching his eye. "I—I—Oh! I owe you an apology: I owe you more than that." He paused awkwardly, and then said, boyishly, "Will you shake hands with me, Midget, and call it quits? I will work for your respect later on."

The Midget grinned. "Why, sure, Bounder," he said, cordially. "Sure!" He gripped the other's hand and wrung it.

As they beached, two or three of the baseball fellows met them. They eyed the two wet figures significantly, and grinned irritatingly at Bounder's black and blue eye and bruised chin.

" 'That baby pitching arm,' " whispered one to another, "seems—"

Bounder turned on the fellow sharply. "It isn't a baby pitching arm," he shouted angrily; "it's muscle, clean muscle; the strongest arm I ever saw. And The Midget's the whitest chap I know, and—and—" He

stopped, glaring at the astonished fellows before him.

"And I say so," he declared, with a jerky wave of his arm; "I, the only coward who ever dared, or ever will dare, to call it or him anything else."

Big Coach Kling winked solemnly at his players, and they walked off, very much puzzled and somewhat pleased at the sudden throning of The Midget. And, to this day, only the three principals know what happened out on the lake.

CHAPTER THREE

"SIT down, Midget," invited Coach Kling, as the boy stepped into the latter's room. "Sit down a minute till I can get these percentages down on paper, and then I'll talk to you."

The boy sat down and looked around. It was the first time he had ever seen Kling's room, and he was deeply interested. The big coach had told him to come up directly after baseball practise to talk over the situation.

The season was near its end— and the college nine was in second place. There were only two weeks left, and but two games, both Saturday ones. The usual mid-week contests had been omitted from the schedule on account of the final examinations that were at hand.

"What I wanted to show you," said Kling, suddenly, interrupting The Midget's stare at the college trophies and the bats, balls, and masks that had been through royal contests in the past; "what I wanted to show you was this table of percentages. As you see, we're second, just a trifle over one game behind, with two battles against the leaders. If we win both—and we've got to do it, Midget—we'll be the fraction of a point ahead for the inter-collegiate championship."

"Yes, sir," said The Midget, "I know."

"You know?" asked Kling, sharply.

"Yes, sir, I've figured it all out. I'm—you see, I'm as much interested as you are." He said it with an embarrassed little laugh.

Kling's eyes opened wide with pleasure. "Good!" he exclaimed. "Good! I can count on you."

The Midget's teeth came together, and his chin went

out the least little bit. "I'll win my game," he said, emphatically.

"Yes," nodded Kling, "and you'll do more. You'll have to win both of them. I've decided to let you pitch to-morrow and also next Saturday."

There was nothing to say. The Midget gulped once or twice, and tried to smile happily. At last he had the entire confidence of the big man, in spite of a more or less disastrous season. So the boy only said, "Thank you!" very mechanically, and fell to talking of other points of the game.

The next day when they warmed up, Midget looked rather pale. Kling saw it, and asked the trouble.

"I couldn't sleep," confessed the boy, shame-facedly. "I—I guess I am a little nervous."

Kling's face clouded. "Shall I put Carper in?" he asked.

Blake raised his hand so suddenly that the coach wished he had not said it. The boy's cheeks flushed.

"No, sir," said The Midget, "I'll win."

"All right," agreed Kling, quietly. He started to walk away, and then came back. "I didn't sleep eith-

er, Midget," he confessed. "I wonder if you know what it means to me to have you win. I've given half a year of my best efforts to put the team on top. I—" He stopped, a little sorry for his display of emotion until he saw The Midget's big, round eyes sympathizing with him. He knew the boy would pitch as he had never pitched before.

But The Midget, in spite of his determination, was clearly nervous. When Gleason, who had caught him ever since the first game, signaled for the "spit" ball, the boy sent it whizzing ten feet above his head. A dozen times they tried it, and a dozen times the pitch was wild. It was largely Gleason's fault, perhaps, for the catcher had a disconcerting habit of waving his glove in a circle while he waited for the peculiar throw. It irritated The Midget, and he told the catcher so. Gleason was all contrition, and promised not to do it again. But every time he did, from pure force of habit. It would never do to throw that way with men on bases.

At last the game began. The Midget's team batted first, and were retired without a man's seeing the initial bag. When the other nine came up, the first batter

grasped the stick firmly and waited. Two strikes and two balls were called on him before he even swung. When he did, he met the ball squarely, and sent a liner straight into The Midget's hands.

The ball was batted back to him before he had recovered his position from the pitch. He felt a sudden sting in his hands, heard a roar from the grandstand—and dropped the ball. Confused, he tore desperately after it, caught it in his hand as it rolled, and putting all the muscle of his arm into the throw, shot it to first.

It went three feet over the baseman's head, and the runner skirted second and was resting on third before the ball was back.

Then Finnegan, the next batter, known as "the man who never struck out," signaled down the third-base line, and the first run came in.

The Midget brushed the hair from his forehead and stopped till his hand was done shaking. Then he pitched—pitched like a demon. Batters were mowed down in one, two, three order. When the ball was hit at all, it went straight into the hands of some fielder. The snappy work seemed infectious; not an error was

made. And so the game went on, inning after inning, with no more runs for either side, and with the score 1 to 0.

In the sixth The Midget's hopes began to revive. Big Kennedy dropped a safe one into right field, and the next batter swung his bat idly while four balls shot past, an inch from the plate. Then Gleason sent a long fly to right field, and Kennedy went to third after it was caught.

The Midget was up. He grasped his bat firmly, and looked toward Kling, who was coaching from the third-base line. The big fellow lifted a finger idly, and The Midget stiffened, every nerve alert. He had been given the signal to work the "squeeze" play; he must hit the first ball pitched, no matter where it came nor where the hit went, to give Kennedy a chance to score.

It seemed to The Midget as if the pitcher took hours to throw. He rubbed the ball on the grass, and then on the soft dirt. He wiped off his hand, and sifted a little sand over it to give him a firmer grip on the ball. Finally, however, he grasped it tightly, swung his arm in the

peculiar movement to which the batters were becoming accustomed, and threw.

Even as his arm circled, The Midget saw Kennedy start. Desperately the boy held out his bat limply. It seemed to him that the ball was as big as a balloon as it shot toward him; then suddenly it grew small—too infinitely small to hit. It lagged in the air, it wavered to one side, it stopped altogether. At last, just as The Midget, with the perspiration breaking out all over him, had given up hope, it struck his bat, and rebounded gently out into the diamond.

At the crack of the bat The Midget was off. The white line to first seemed to mock him, and he staggered a little, as an intoxicated man might. Half way there he felt a blind, unreasoning desire to turn and see what had happened. Up in the grandstand, where the crowd had been so noisy, there was absolute silence.

The Midget heard a sudden roar from the crowd—his crowd; a roar of delight, and at his left, from somewhere out in the diamond, the ball whizzed to first. They had failed to get Kennedy at the plate. The "squeeze" play had worked, and the score was tied!

Then he pitched—pitched like a demon.—Page 144

[illegible]

After that, the fanning of the next man was a small matter. The score was tied,—that was all that counted. The teams were on equal terms again, and The Midget's gloom was dispelled. Now he felt happy, light-hearted, gay, as if the game were already won.

But this battle was by no means over. Both nines were fighting for a championship, and both were warring desperately. Time after time, only phenomenal catches in the outfield, or snappy playing around the bases, prevented runs.

The ninth inning came and went. Over in the west the sun hugged the horizon. But the spectators were not impatient; for the game was magnificent.

It happened in the tenth. The Midget had fanned the first batter and the second was up when the ball slipped from the boy's hand and hit the man at the bat. Sorry, but by no means discouraged, The Midget prepared to strike out the next. Whether it was his fault or Gleason's, they were never able to settle; but in some way the signals crossed, and the catcher flung himself desperately after an out-curve that he expected to swerve in the opposite direction. He stopped it

with his bare right hand, and with the very tips of his fingers; but it split one of his nails and the blood spurted ominously.

It was Kling who reached him first. Down in his heart a great fear began to grow. If Gleason were injured too much to continue, there was only Pinder, who could never handle The Midget's balls, and Bounder, who had done so much to injure the pitcher's chances early in the season.

His worst fears were realized. Gleason's whole finger-tip was torn, and it was a sheer impossibility for him to catch another ball. Kling called The Midget.

"There's only Pinden," he said, helplessly, "and you know he can't do it."

"There's Bounder," suggested the Midget, smiling a little. "And when he's willing, Bounder's mighty good."

For a minute the coach stared at the boy. Then he turned abruptly, and called Bounder, who came running forward without his glove, sure that he would not be put in.

"You'll catch me," said The Midget, tersely, "and you'll help me win."

There was a suggestion of a question in the last words. Bounder looked up quickly.

"Yes, we'll win," he said, so quietly that both the others knew he was holding himself in by pure will-power. "I have been waiting all season just for this chance, Midget."

Kling's face lighted. The puzzle had seemed so complicated that no solution was possible; and yet it was all very simple.

So Bounder caught and The Midget pitched. Never had a battery worked together to better advantage. Up in the grandstand, the uninitiated wondered why the combination had never been tried before. They surely seemed to play into each other's hands.

And in the first half of the eleventh inning, after the tenth had passed without a score, Bounder came up to bat, fresh and untried by the opposing battery, and whipped a long, low drive far out into right field for three bases. Then the Midget, who was too small to hit far, but who could sacrifice magnificently, bunted half way down the first base line, and Bounder scored.

The last half of the eleventh began with the score 2 to 1, and the game seemed won.

But the losers had not given up. The first batter whistled a liner just over short-stop, and perched triumphantly on first. Thorne, the next man up, was weak, and The Midget shot them straight over, with just enough curve to prevent his meeting them squarely, so as he drew back his arm to pitch the thirdstrike, he heard the other coach implore the batter not to knock into a double. The Midget smiled when the batter popped up a high in-field fly. He knew the other team was glad he had gone out without forcing anybody.

The ball was between the pitcher and second. The baseman came up under it, and The Midget raced back of him to be ready for a possible error. As he ran, he glanced back. The batter, disgusted, was trotting slowly to first, and the runner was hugging the bag. An inspiration came to The Midget.

"Drop it," he whispered shrilly to the second baseman, "and line it to second for a double."

The other's eyes kindled, as he nodded, still with hands poised high for the ball. As it fell, however, he

suddenly jumped back, took it on the bounce, and snapped it quickly to The Midget on second, who in turn threw it hard to first. The runner was forced, and the man was out at first.

It was a double play that brought the crowd to its feet. A roar of appreciation of such brainy playing came out to the boy and the batter, reproved by the coach for not running it out, slunk back to the bench. There was still a chance, however, and the team always died fighting.

The chance developed into a possibility and even a probability. For the first time there was an error in the out-field, and on what should have been a put-out the batter reached third. It was disheartening to the Midget, as a grievous error always is to a pitcher at a critical point, but the boy did not falter. Carefully, skilfully, he prepared to pitch to Finnegan, "the man who never struck out."

The big Irishman was determined to get a hit; not over anxious, but sure. The Midget sent in his best out-curve, and Finnegan hit it far across the field. It was foul, to be sure, but it showed The Midget what to expect.

The boy beckoned to the catcher.

"Bounder," he said, "we've got to fan him, and there is only one way— with the 'spit' ball. I'll try to control it, and you must stop them if they do go wild."

"Yes," said Bounder.

"And keep me cool," blurted out The Midget.

So that was it. The catcher looked up quickly. "I saw how Gleason irritated you," he said simply. "I have been studying you and Gleason all the season just for this chance."

He went behind the bat and adjusted his mask. First he signaled for a wide straight ball. The Midget threw it.

"One ball!" called the umpire.

Bounder signaled for a wide-out curve.

"Two balls!" echoed the umpire.

Finnegan grinned. " 'Fraid to let me hit it?" he sneered to Bounder.

The latter did not answer. He had signaled for the "spit" ball, and was holding his glove exactly where he wanted the throw. As The Midget hesitated, he nodded confidently, never swerving his position, and somehow a flood of confidence came over the little

pitcher. He *could* throw it; he could do it as easily as he could put over a straight one."

Finnegan straightened up and drew back his bat. The ball looked a perfect strike. He swung, tried to stop the bat half way, and then completed the semicircle six inches wide!

"Strike two!" called the umpire. The foul had been the first.

Nobody cheered. The silence was awful. Neither Finnegan nor Bounder chided each other now. Every fielder was leaning forward, hands on his knees, waiting. Even the umpire, now behind the catcher, was resting all his weight on his forward foot.

Bounder signaled for another "spit" ball. It was quite unnecessary to call for it. The Midget knew he must throw it as well as the catcher. Even Finnegan understood what was to come.

It began like the first, and the batter bit his lips with eagerness till the blood came. He told himself he must hit it. But, a half dozen feet from the plate, it broke from its line as the friction of the air on the moist surface caught it, and Finnegan, "the man who never struck out," swung wildly and fanned

The game was won by a score of 2 to 1, and the championship was only a few points away.

As the crowd broke upon the field, The Midget trotted over to Bounder. As he reached him, Kling came up with them.

"Good boy, Midget," was all he said, but there was a world of affection in his voice.

The Midget grinned happily. "And, Bounder," he declared, "you're a 'good boy,' too. Isn't he, Kling?"

"He certainly is," exclaimed the coach, heartily; and both he and The Midget liked the pleased flush on the catcher's face. His chance had come and he had met it splendidly.

CHAPTER FOUR

"SOME of them are pretty valuable, aren't they?" asked Bounder.

The Midget looked up quickly and laughed; laughed until he caught the narrow glint in the other's eyes; and then stopped suddenly, awed and ashamed.

"Ye-es," he stammered, "pretty valuable, I guess. How about it Kling?"

The big coach looked around proudly. It was the trophy room of the gymnasium, and cups and urns and medals and pennants all cried for recognition. It was a handsome display.

"Yes," replied Kling, "but they're a thousand times more valuable as trophies than as marketable stuff. Still, here's a loving cup, for example, that the chaps gave us when we resumed athletic relations with the Cardinals; it's worth a few dollars."

"But you couldn't sell it for much," protested the Midget.

"But you could!" It was Bounder's voice, and the words were almost angry. "I know a fellow in the city—Vohen he is—who would take it in a minute. If you're careless about locking up, some chap with no money and lots of debts, like me, will get it."

There was more to the conversation, but it soon drifted to other topics. Not until Thursday evening, after practise, was it recalled by The Midget. He was dressing, after a swim in the tank, and had just closed his locker when he felt a hand on his arm.

The coach's face told him that something was wrong. Neither spoke until they were outside the building; then Kling faced the boy.

"It's gone!" he said, hoarsely.

"What?" asked The Midget, bewildered.

"The cup—the trophy—the one—"

It was The Midget who finished the sentence. "—the one you showed Bounder?"

Over at Library Hall the clock tolled six. Not until the last clang had echoed and re-echoed into silence did the two cease staring at each other.

"I don't believe he took it," protested The Midget.

"Nor I," agreed Kling, "but—"

The Midget whistled softly. "You don't suppose," he suggested "that it would be worth while running into the city?" He stopped. "Vohen's is just off Eighth Avenue on Twenty-third Street, you know," he continued, as carelessly as he could.

"I'll go," said Kling, decisively. "You turn in early and say nothing about it."

It was nearly noon of the next day before The Midget saw him again. There came a gentle tap at the door of the boy's room, and Kling pushed his way in.

"Bounder did it," he said dejectedly. "It was there, big as life, left by a smooth-faced young man, according to Vohen. And Bounder went to the city night before last."

"But—"

"Isn't that enough?" snapped Kling. He was tired and irritable. The thought of the deciding baseball game on the following day, with Gleason out of it on account of a sore finger, and Bounder—he sat up very suddenly.

"Look here, Midget," he began. "The fellow's a thief—no doubt of that. But we must use him in the game to-morrow. We must win that game, and we can't do it without him. Why can't we simply let the matter slide till next week; why can't—"

"Because," said The Midget, very simply, "because we can't. There's only one thing to do: call him and let him prove his innocence."

"But he can't; he isn't innocent."

They sent for Bounder, and he came. Kling did the talking, while The Midget looked on, silent and sympathizing.

At the first suggestion of the cup, Bounder flushed. But when he began to see that he was accused of stealing it, his anger burst forth. He looked from one to the other.

Kling raised his hand. "The Midget," he said, frankly, "still believes in you enough to hope. I can not."

An hour later they went out of the room, Bounder protesting his innocence one minute and blazing forth in anger the next, Kling very silent and sorrowful, and The Midget looking as if he were the one who had been accused.

Bounder practised that afternoon, vowing to prove

his innocence in time. On these terms both Kling and The Midget agreed that he should be allowed to pitch the game on the following day.

But on Saturday morning, when they called at his room for another talk, he was gone. On the table was a note addressed to The Midget.

"It's no use," it said; "I've gone. Kling is sure I am a thief, and you are almost convinced. I can't catch the game feeling as I do now."

And then, in a postscript down at the bottom: "I hope the old college wins!"

When The Midget had read the note, he handed it to Kling. The big coach read it twice, stared out of the window and then faced the boy.

"I wonder," he said, "if we could have been mistaken, after all. That postscript—"

As the two crossed the campus, a uniformed boy ran up to the coach and handed him a telegram. Kling ripped it open hastily, and read it with an exclamation of surprise and consternation. He passed the telegram to The Midget.

"Have man—confessed—professional—not the party under suspicion—positive. Stone."

"Stone?" asked the boy.

"Detective," said Kling tersely. They walked on

silently. "Midget," blurted out the big coach, "it wasn't Bounder at all. And he's gone—where?"

With one accord they turned toward the register's office. A few hurried questions and a consultation of names and addresses brought forth the fact that the catcher's home was in Mayville, a town about twenty miles up the State.

"I'll go," said Kling.

"No, let me go," urged The Midget. "I'm not sure he'd come for you."

The coach nodded. Luck favored The Midget in the catching of a train, and he soon dropped off at Mayville, a little town set in the midst of dense woods. From the time tables he learned that return trains left at noon and three o'clock. "If we miss the first," he told himself, "the second will get us there about the beginning of the second inning."

He found Bounder's home readily enough. In answer to his knock a kindly grey-haired lady, who proved to be the mother, came to the door.

"I don't know just where Rob is," she said, in answer to his question. "He took his gun this morning and went out into North Woods. He came home worried about something, and said he wouldn't be back till supper-time."

"Said that he wouldn't be back till supper-time?" The Midget repeated the words dully.

"Rob's in the North Woods somewhere," she persisted. "You might run across him."

The Midget thanked her mechanically, and turned away, sick at heart. To the north, shining warm and green in their fresh spring leaves, the trees of the North Woods beckoned. It was only one chance in a thousand, but the boy took it. First he wired Kling not to expect him till after three; then he plunged across the pasture into the woods.

Outside the sun had been shining, hot and glaring. Among the trees, however, it was cool and dark. The change was a welcome one to The Midget, and he sat down on a stump to study the situation. It would not do to go about his work blindly.

Before he had left the village, he had noted that the strip of woods was dotted with hills and gullies. Now he determined to climb toward the highest points, and to "holloo" when he reached them. In this way he hoped he might attract Bounder's attention, or might possibly see him.

The Midget was no woodsman. The vines entangled his feet; the soft, decaying wood tripped him; the briars and bushes swished across his face, leaving red welts.

It seemed an hour before he reached the first summit, although his watch told him it was only ten minutes. Once there he was disappointed to find that he could see little; that he only looked down on a dense blanket of green formed by the waving tree tops. He shouted frantically, but received no answering call.

The next hill was lower, and the trees were fewer. His first shout brought an answer, far ahead, and his hopes waxed high. Holding his position he shouted again and again, gradually guiding the other toward him. The Midget was ready to dance with joy.

Then the man came into sight—not Bounder at all—and the Midget called himself a fool for supposing that the catcher was the only man in the North Woods.

The man eyed him curiously, and awaited his explanation. He was a rough, uncouth fellow.

"I'm looking for a fellow named Bounder—Rob Bounder," he explained. "He's somewhere in these woods here. I want to locate him as soon as possible."

The other nodded. "I see him a while back," he said, "a-steerin' into the woods. That was an hour past, howsoever. Better keep a-drillin' right on."

The Midget thanked him, and plunged forward. The sparse growth of trees soon gave way to a dense tangle and the boy found his progress greatly retarded.

A twig caught his trouser-leg and tore it. His cap had been swept aside long before. His left hand was bleeding a little where he had struck it against thorns and dead limbs. His right he thrust into his coat. At all events, he must pitch the game that afternoon, Bounder or no Bounder.

He looked at his watch, and whistled apprehensively. It was almost two, and he had been in the woods nearly three hours. He must hurry to catch the train himself.

Guiding himself by the sun, which had begun to creep down the western sky, he walked and ran back toward the village. Twice he fell, and both times he wrenched his left wrist. It began to pain him slightly, but he only shut his lips firmly and pushed on. It was not his pitching wrist.

When he emerged from the main woods finally, the village lay a long way ahead, separated from him by a stretch of green pasture land, cut in two by a narrow strip of thick trees. He had only a quarter of an hour to catch his train.

As he raced over the pasture to the trees, he thought of his hopeless search and of what Bounder's absence from the game meant to the team.

And then, just at the edge of the strip of trees, where

the shade and sun met, he nearly stumbled over the boy, fast asleep.

Like some wild animal The Midget pounced upon him. The catcher stirred uneasily, seemed inclined to shake him off, and then opened his eyes. Blank amazement gave way to profound disbelief as he began to see and understand clearly.

"Midget Blake!" he exclaimed, "what are you doing here?"

There was no time for explanations.

"I've come to take you back with me," said the boy. "You've got to catch for me in the game, you know."

"What?" asked the bewildered Bounder.

The Midget said the words over again.

The big fellow on the ground leaned back against the tree. "I won't," he announced, stubbornly. "Do you suppose I am going to play under the circumstances? When you get the truth—"

"We've got it," yelled The Midget. "We've got—" A long whistle in the distance made him pause. "We have got the real thief. Hurry, we *must* make that train."

Bounder shook the sleepiness from his frame. "Are you telling me the truth, Midget?" he asked.

"Yes, yes," cried the boy, frantic at the delay. "For

goodness' sake, Bounder, hurry! Come, I'll tell you all about it on the train. It's nearly at the station—the three o'clock, you know!"

Bounder awoke. With an exclamation of surprise he whipped out his watch; then he jumped to The Midget's side.

"We'll run for it," he exclaimed. "Come on!"

It was slow progress through the tangle of trees. On the other side, however, stretched a long field of close cropped grass, with a few cows grazing upon it.

The Midget put his whole strength into the running. Bounder seemed to be possessed of a tremendous speed and of untiring legs. The Midget could not understand the strained muscles in his own until he recalled the long tramp in the woods. But even if his strength was nearly gone, he had grit and nerve.

The train was in sight, a scant quarter of a mile away. Between the boys and the station was a rail fence, perhaps five feet high. Before they had reached it, the train was slowing down.

"Vault it," said Bounder, and, with his hands on the top rail, went over it like a bird.

It looked impossible to The Midget. His legs were beginning to go back on him. But he flew at it gamely, charging it as he might an opponent in football. His

hands grasped the top rail, and he put every ounce of tired muscle into the spring.

He went up lightly, but his feet failed to clear the rail. The shock broke the hold of his hands, and he plunged over, a helpless mass of legs and arms.

But Bounder had anticipated something of the kind. After his vault, he had whirled, to help The Midget, if necessary. Quickly comprehending what had taken place, he caught the boy in his arms. Together they rolled upon the ground, but Bounder was up no more promptly than The Midget. Without a word they raced across the cinder road that circled the station, and ran desperately for the rear car.

Bounder literally threw The Midget upon the platform, and a brakeman hauled both of them to a safe position. The Midget, with his perspiring, dirty, bloody face and torn clothes presented a most unattractive appearance. The brakeman eyed him curiously.

"You've had a run," he remarked, quite superfluously. "You must have started late."

The Midget wiped off his face with his handkerchief before he replied.

"Not too late," he said, looking at Bounder.

The Championship Game

CHAPTER FIVE

THE last game was scheduled for three-thirty, but long before that time the crowd began to arrive. Every street car was jammed; every carriage held more than its allotted number. In the hands of nearly every spectator was a pennant or flag of some kind—most of them crimson, but a few deep blue.

The teams reached the grounds a little before three, and the visitors went out to practise at once. Big Coach Kling watched them with an eye like a hawk. Down in his heart there was heavy gloom. From the

telegram he knew that The Midget had not found Bounder at home, and he began to doubt if the catcher had gone that way at all. Perhaps he was in the city trying to clear himself. The next train from Mayville was due a minute or two after the game was scheduled to start, but the station was nearly a mile away. He had left a cab there ready for the run; but he had little hope. He doubted if even The Midget would come.

After a brisk preliminary practise of fifteen minutes, the gong clanged, and Kling sent out his own men. Not until now had it dawned upon the others that with The Midget and Bounder both missing, they had only a portion of the last week's successful nine. When they asked the coach about the missing battery, he smiled, trying to be cheerful. At all odds, he must keep up the spirits of the players.

"They will be here," he promised, confidently; "a little late, it may be, but we can go through an inning or two without them."

Carper was warming up to pitch, and Pinden was catching him. Kling watched them critically. Occasionally the latter dropped the ball. Often the former shot it hopelessly wide. Kling groaned. It seemed to him the nine had not a chance in the world to win.

The gong rang again. It was time for the game to

begin. Kling spoke to one or two of the fielders, and they wasted time in a way that made the spectators protest loudly. Up in the grandstand they did not understand the delay.

At last, however, it was impossible to wait longer. Kling gave the signal, and the game was on. The umpire tossed out a white ball to Carper, who shot it in to Pinden three times. Then the official called, "Play ball!" and the catcher sent it down to second—three feet to the left of the base.

The first batter got his base on balls, and stole second on Pinden's wide throw. A sacrifice sent him to third. Up in the grandstand the blue pennants waved hysterically, and a short, choppy college yell drifted down to Coach Kling.

Carper grinned a little sheepishly, and took the ball. He had an elaborate arm movement that began in front of him and ended in a double-circle swing. It was calculated to puzzle the batter, and sometimes it succeeded. To-day it irritated Kling, and he wished the boy would be more simple.

The runner on third raced off the base and back again. Carper whipped the ball to baseman, but did not catch the runner off the bag. Three times he tried this, and three times the umpire shook his head. Then

Carper, abandoning the idea of playing for the runner, began to wind up for the pitch.

Kling saw it first. Like a shot the runner began to race for home. The coach jumped from the bench with a quick roar of command to Carper. But the pitcher, stopped in the midst of his arm gyrations, seemed utterly bewildered. For a long, precious instant he stared stupidly at the runner. It was so absurd to try to steal home that he could not understand. Then, catching himself with an effort, the pitcher seemed to unwind, and threw to Pinden. There was a swirl of dust at the home plate, but when it cleared the umpire was standing there, palm to the ground, roaring, "Runner is safe!" The man had stolen home with the ball in Carper's hand.

From that moment Carper lost his head. All his skill gave way to his wildness. He hit one batter, and walked another. His slow drop ball, of which he was so proud, failed entirely to curve, and Finnegan, the mighty, slammed out a home-run. The score was 4 to 0, and only one man was out.

It was sheer luck that nobody else hit safely. It was fast fielding that made the next two outs possible, not Carper's pitching.

Kling called to him. They walked to one side.

"Carper," said the big coach, "you've got to do better. If The Midget were here—"

"The Midget!" blazed out the pitcher. "Why you fool, he's afraid to play. What do you suppose keeps him away? He's lost his nerve. He's—"

It was seldom that Kling lost his temper, but he did it now. *He* knew why The Midget was not there. To have this insulting, self-centered fellow slur the boy was too much. He was angry all over.

"That's enough from you," he stormed. "You go back to the gymnasium and stay there!"

Carper had not expected this. He knew that the only substitute pitchers were hopelessly weak, and he imagined the coach would not dare take him out. But there was no doubting Kling's decision. Carper turned quickly.

"All right," he said, "I'll go. But you'll lose the game sure now. You'll lose it sure; do you hear me? And I hope you do—I hope the college loses the championship."

After his outburst Kling had cooled. He knew it was a waste of time bandying words with the fellow, and he turned sharply on his heel and went to the bench. Down in his throat was a little lump when he contrasted this player's wishes with those of Bounder

His first batter fanned. The second hit too short, and was easily thrown out. The third sent a high foul, which was easily gathered in by the catcher.

Little Dobbins was sent in to pitch. The youngster was willing enough, but he had neither good curves nor great speed. One man flied out, but the next three all hit safely, and the bases were full.

Up in the grandstand they hooted a little. It looked like an ignominious defeat. Dobbins called to Kling.

"I can't do it," he sobbed. "I know I can't do it. I'd do anything for the college and you, Kling; but I can't hold down a team of sluggers. Take me out."

The coach's face did not change a feature. Calmly, as if it were only a small matter at best, he turned to the bench. "Clarke," he called, "come here."

Another pitcher, a long, lank fellow, came forward. Kling looked at him, and remembered his former hopeless experiences. But there was nothing else to do.

Out at the gate there was a shout. Kling looked quickly. For a moment his eyes saw nothing but the blaze of color in the grandstand. Instead of blurring before his eyes as it had done, however, it seemed to take shape. A curious fancy that the blue was the sky, and the crimson the tints of dawn crept into the coach's mind. It meant promise, hope—everything!

A cab rolled into the grounds, and two figures in street clothes leaped out. The crowd saw a little figure with a scratched face and torn clothes run up to Kling, with another following. Then somebody recognized them, and the crowd began to cheer hysterically for "Midget—Midget Blake." Somehow it seemed the salvation of the game was at hand.

The boy whipped of his coat and rolled up his right shirt-sleeve. Smiling confidently he walked into the pitcher's box and threw a half dozen balls to the other player not in uniform. Then the umpire raised his hand, and the game was on again.

There was almost a riot in the grandstand when the next two batters fanned, with three on bases, and the side was retired. Pennants waved like a surging sea; men hugged one another and brought down their canes on other men's hats.

Not only had The Midget's coming braced his own team, but it had served to unnerve the leaders. While the boy and Bounder were getting into uniforms in the little room under the grandstand, their team was batting fiercely. When they emerged, just as the inning ended, the score-keeper put up the figure 2. Two runs that inning—and only two behind.

They tell to this day how The Midget pitched the

next six innings, and they tell it in a lowered voice, as if it were a thing not possible now. And they tell, too, how in the eighth, with runners on second and third, the boy whipped a long, clean single past first, scoring the two men on bases and tying the score.

It was then that the noise burst all bounds. Bedlam broke loose. Men rushed down on the diamond to grasp the little pitcher's hand, and were ordered off by the umpire.

But the score was only tied, and the game had yet to be won. The first batter in the ninth was Finnegan, now renamed, "the man who struck out only once," and it was out of the question to expect anything but a fearful drive from him. Larrup, the loosely-built left fielder, was cautioned by The Midget to play close to the eight-foot fence that bounded the field.

"They mustn't score, Larry," he said; "they must not! Finnegan will probably hit to you, and you've got to make him fly out."

Larrup had a soft heart, and he admired The Midget greatly. "I won't get past me, boy, not even if I have to go over the fence and catch it on the other side."

So the inning began. Finnegan waited, letting two outside balls and even one strike go past unchallenged. He waited till a great dread began to take root down

in The Midget's heart. And then—then he hit the ball.

When The Midget heard the crack of the bat, and saw the ball sail toward left field, he knew at once that it was over Larrup's head—probably over the fence. A sudden weakness made his legs tremble and threaten to give way beneath him. He felt like sitting down and crying—sobbing like a baby. It was only one run, and there was a chance—just a lone chance—of offsetting it in the last half of the ninth.

For a second after the ball was hit, Larrup stood stock still. Then he turned sharply and raced for the fence, never looking back till he reached it. The Midget waited, breathless, hoping the fielder might put up his hands to catch it. Instead he turned and faced the fence. The ball must be hopelessly over his head. It would be impossible to shut off the run.

Then Larrup did something that brought the crowd to its feet stark mad. He ran straight for the fence, jumped for the top board, and hanging there with one hand, thrust up his glove a foot above his head—and *caught* the ball!

It was almost impossible to restore order. It was the most wonderful one-handed catch the crowd had ever seen. Coach Kling, who had run out from the

bench, staggered back to it, limp and weak with the sudden revulsion of feeling. Only the Midget smiled. "Larrup made good!" he told himself over and over. "Now it's my turn."

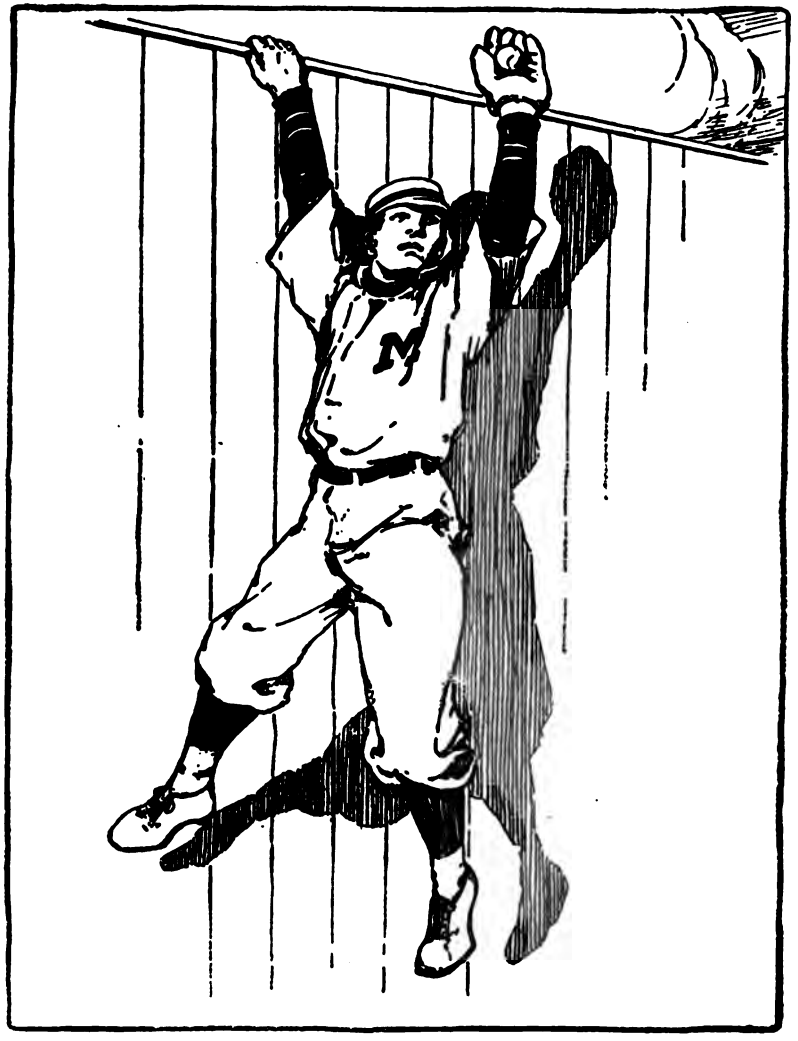
No sooner had the crowd quieted than it was on its feet again, cheering The Midget, with three straight strike-outs to his credit.

Bounder was the first man at bat in the last half of the ninth. Inspired by the wonderful playing of his team-mates, he put his whole soul into the idea of hitting safely. A pitch, exactly to his liking, gave him the opportunity, and he singled along the third-base line.

The Midget was up. Kling signaled to him to sacrifice, and the boy caught the first strike and bunted it perfectly toward first. In an instant he was even with the slowly rolling ball, and side by side he raced it to base. The pitcher endeavored to scoop it up, and get it to the man on first, but failed. There were two men on bases and nobody out.

Big Anderson flied far into deep center, and Bounder raced to third after the ball was caught. The Midget, however, was held on first.

Coach Kling put in Robertson, who played substitute, to bat in place of the next man. He failed to get a hit, however, and neither Bounder nor The Midget



Thrust up his glove a foot above his head—and caught the ball!—Page 175

Afternoon after afternoon the team practised.—Page 185

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advanced on his weak hit. There were two out, and a run seemed as far away as ever, in spite of the man on third.

From the third-base line, Kling signaled for The Midget to go down to second on the first pitched ball, hoping to work the double-steal and score Bounder. The boy raced down the line, keeping a wary eye on the ball. The catcher started to throw it, hesitated, and finally tossed it to the pitcher. The Midget, who had watched his indecision, halted suddenly, three feet from second base. Then, to the amazement of the great crowd, the boy doubled on his tracks and ran back to first.

It was new to the crowd on the grandstand, that gasped and declared that the boy was a fool; it was new to the other pitcher, who stood stupidly with the ball in his hand. After the buzz of comment had died down, the crowd saw the pitcher deliver another strike, and The Midget run for second again.

Just how bewildered the catcher had been by the seeming idiocy of The Midget, would be hard to say. Certain it is, however, that when he saw the boy running between the same bases a second time, he determined to end the matter, and end it quickly. In all probability, his amazement at the previous play made

him forget, at least temporarily, the runner on third. He shot the ball clear to second, and not to the short-stop playing just behind the pitcher. The throw was low, and the second-baseman was forced to stoop almost to the ground to take it. Now, as everybody knows, on a low catch it is necessary to straighten up before the ball can be returned, and precious seconds are lost in the movement. Kling had coached Bounder off for home the instant the catcher threw, and before the ball was whizzing back he was nearly at the plate. He threw himself desperately into the air, head first, and with hands extended like a diver, plunged for the white block that meant safety and victory.

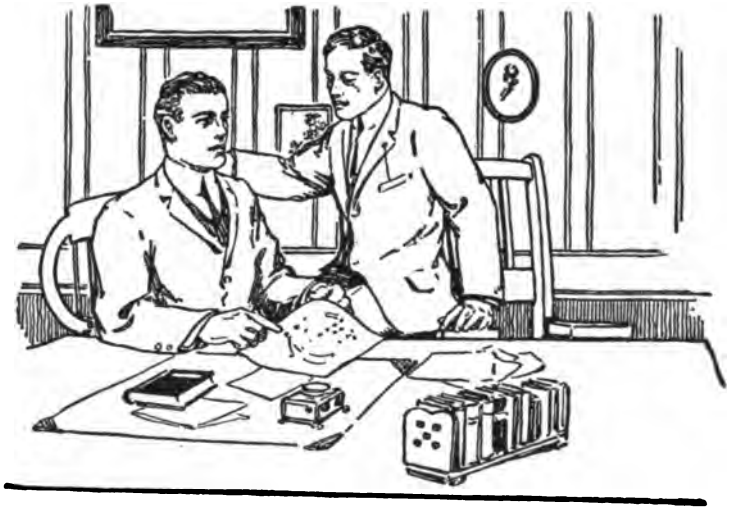
The crowd watched and waited, with the grandstand and bleachers as still as they were when not a soul occupied them. Long before the dust had cleared, the bellow of the umpire rang out, the signal for Bedlam once more.

"The runner is safe!"

The game was won, and with it the inter-collegiate championship.

The Trick Play

He ran forward slowly gauging his position nicely.—Page 193



CHAPTER ONE

THE TRICK EXPLAINED

THE coach puckered his brow thoughtfully.

"As I understand it," he said slowly, looking at the dots and lines on the paper, "the ball is passed from this point clear across to this one."

"Yes," agreed Blenner, eagerly; "yes, that's it. The trick is brand new, so far as I know, though it's so ridiculously simple that it's a wonder others haven't discovered it. It will work nine times out of ten."

"And the tenth time?" asked the coach, in his slow, deliberate way. "When we play that post-season game on Christmas day, out in California, there must

be no chance for a bungle. A single misplay might mean the game."

The other's face clouded.

"Well, Jordan," he admitted, "if the trick does fail, there's a great unprotected gap just here, and—" He hesitated.

"And a touchdown for the other team," finished the coach.

"Ye-er-yes, I suppose it might easily amount to that. But with a little practise and a cool, steady quarter-back, it—"

"Oh!" exclaimed the coach. Before Blenner looked at him he knew that the disappointment in his tone had been recognized. "Little Roe could never handle it at a crucial moment, and we must use him."

Coach Jordan spoke decisively.

"But—"

"We will abandon the idea," said the coach, so evenly that the queer pain in his heart passed unsuspected. "We dare not take the chance with Roe at quarter-back."

Almost before he had finished, the door opened, and little Roe walked into the room.

Some impulse made Blenner show the boy the paper and go over minutely the details of the play. As the idea dawned upon him, Roe's eyes grew round and big.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, in boyish delight. "It's just the thing, isn't it, Mr. Jordan?"

The coach's grizzled eyebrows lowered a little. He clenched his hands as if to gain courage for what he was about to say.

"We shall not use it," he began, in the quiet, calm voice that was part of the man; "because a single slip might mean the loss of the game, and because you, Roe, are very apt to grow excited and lose your head at the critical instant."

The little quarter's face went very red. The coach felt genuinely sorry for the boy, but he did not regret having spoken plainly. It might key him up for the game.

"I see," said Roe, after a long pause; "I see." He moistened his lips as if to speak again; then he turned toward the door, forgetting his errand, and went out.

Blenner looked at Jordan curiously. "It hurt," he remarked.

"The truth always does," replied Jordan quietly. "I am afraid of what that boy will do in the Christmas game; I can't depend on him. The game is for the championship of the West, of course, and it means so much to me that I dare not think of the result if he should fail me."

So the new trick was never given a trial. The coach drilled the eleven on straight plays. Afternoon after afternoon the team practised till every man was ready to drop from sheer exhaustion, till only the confidence in the coach and the love for the old college kept the

players from rebelling. Evening after evening, in the gymnasium, the eleven players went through signal practise, going over the same formations time after time, until at last each man was only a cog in the great wheel of team-play. When the day of the game came, the eleven was at its best.

On Christmas morning, the coach was the first one in the dining room of the hotel. He wanted to see that the food at the training table was exactly as ordered, and that everything was in readiness. A step sounded behind him, and a voice called,

"Merry Christmas, Mr. Jordan!"

It was Little Roe, and despite the entreaty in the boy's voice, the coach's return salutation was gruff and inexpressive. The little quarter-back turned quickly away, and the coach forgot him as the twenty fellows in the squad noisily found their places at the table.

But from the minute the team donned its football uniform, Little Roe was in Jordan's thoughts continually. Something seemed to tell the coach that the game would be sacrificed because of the boy's sudden loss of grip on himself. He would "go to pieces" just when he should be calm. Had it been possible for Jordan to be near him and encourage him there would be no cause for alarm. But he could only stand on the side-lines, barred from coaching by the rules, and work his grizzled eyebrows as the one outward indication of his agony of mind.

His captain won the toss. With a last word of encouragement to his players, Jordan strode to the side-lines and threw a sweater over his shoulders. He was too restless to sit down.

He saw Fulton, captain of the other team, place the ball on the little mound of dirt he had built. Each of his players was in position, alert, yet fearing the first kick-off, and from a distance came the official's question, "Are you ready?" and the repetition of the word "ready" from the two captains. Then Fulton swung his powerful leg, and kicked the ball high into the air.

Pendon, whom Jordan trusted implicitely, caught the pigskin, and ran it back a good fifteen yards. And almost before he was downed, Roe's shrill voice was calling to the men to line up. There was a note of excitement in it that dulled the coach's eyes with despair. The signals came fast and unevenly, there was a sudden surge forward—and Roe had fumbled the ball!

Jordan drew his breath gaspingly. Was the game to go like this? True, the fumble had meant merely the loss of the ball, but that was quite enough. He wanted to shout to Roe to brace up, to quit making a fool of himself. But he knew the rules about coaching from the side-lines too well.

The boy played back on defense. Jordan watched him anxiously, and even from his position could see the unnatural red of his cheeks and the nervous move-

ments that betokened tremendous excitement. Bit by bit, as each scrimmage was ended, Roe crept nearer to the line of play. Jordan's eyebrows were slanting toward each other, and a deep furrow divided his forehead.

At last the thing of which he was afraid came to pass. An end run, timed to the instant, and behind splendid interference, swept down the tacklers like a mower. A lithe figure, padded and hideous with nose guard and head gear, shot out of the tangle, with the ball tucked under his arm.

And Roe, Little Roe, who should have been far down the field, waiting for just such a play, had crept so close to the line that the runner was out of his reach long before the boy's brain spurred him on toward the man with the ball! It was a touchdown for the other team, and the resulting goal made the score 6-0. Roe had "lost his head."

Jordan paced up and down the side-lines like a wild animal caged in a narrow confine. Nobody could appreciate how much the game meant to him; nobody understood that turning out a championship team was his only business, and that very month of the whole year he gave himself, heart and soul, to the problem of how to do it. And now, because of one player, his twelve months of work were to amount to nothing. Roe had made him fail.

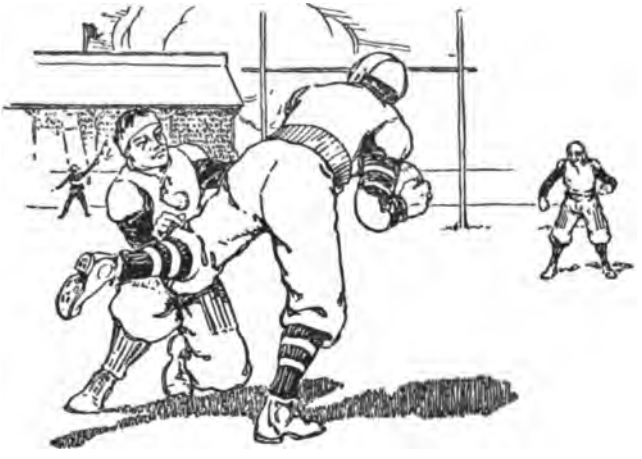
Presently an appreciation of what he had done evi-

dently seemed to brace the little quarter-back. He played with all the might of his little body and all the courage of his big heart. His work was slower, but he took time to think. No one had ever accused Little Roe of cowardice.

So through the first half the teams struggled, one gaining the necessary five yards joyously as the other gave way sullenly. Every inch was contested; every advance was the result of brawn and science. Even Jordan, when his heart grew quieter, felt his eyes glow with admiration.

Up in the grandstands and bleachers the crowd was frantic. The pennants waved continuously, like a field of flowers swept by a gale. Horns tooted; megaphones bellowed; everywhere staid men and women shouted like children. It was a game to kindle the blood.

But when the first half ended the score was still 6-0.



CHAPTER TWO

THE GAME IS WON

IN THE dressing room, where sore limbs were being massaged, and cuts and scratches attended to, Jordan spoke to the players.

"Boys," he said, "you have played magnificently, except at the first, and only one—" He stopped suddenly, as he caught Little Roe's troubled blue eyes full upon him. Something of the dull despair in the boy's heart appealed to him. All at once, he was sorry for the plucky little quarter-back; the anger left his heart as quickly as it had come.

"You have played magnificently," he repeated.

"And no man among you, after those first few minutes, has played a better game that Little Roe! Now, go in and win, boys. Remember what it means to the old college, what it means to you; what it means to me! You must win, boys; you can do it yet."

And then, when the eyes of every player were wide and steely with determination, he outlined the plan of action for the second half. As the men filed out into the field again, the coach placed a hand on Roe's shoulder, and said simply, "I'm depending on you Roe."

Up in the grandstands the crowd was amazed at the life that had been infused into Jordan's team. Every player seemed a demon as he shot down the field. Irresistible the eleven was, and yard by yard, chalk-line by chalk-line, it pushed its way toward the looming goal-posts. Five minutes after the beginning of the second half the ball was down behind the goal-line, and the score was tied.

The coach watched anxiously. He knew the men were playing on false strength, and he feared the collapse would come before the touchdown was made. Once Pendon faltered, and it was Roe's prod and word of encouragement that kept him on his feet. The little quarter-back played as if his heart were as calm as any other; Jordan, who was perhaps the only one to appreciate the turmoil there, felt his eyes soften. After all, Little Roe had recouped what he had lost.

After the touchdown came the reaction. Pendon

and Teale went out of the game, thoroughly exhausted, and substitutes took their places. The eleven was perceptibly weakened by this change, and could do no more than hold its own.

From the field came the announcement, "Five minutes more to play!" Jordan drew himself up, quivering. The game would be a tie, then; that was better than defeat, of course, but—. He clenched his hands and waited, hoping against hope.

The other team had the ball. The quarter-back was running over the numbers. Suddenly a voice cried, "Change signals," and the captain strode forward. There was a brief whispered consultation, and a sudden shift in the back field. Jordan watched, with his eyebrows snarling fearfully. What did it mean?

Then he understood.

The formation was for the very trick play that Blenner had shown him. It would succeed nine times out of ten. And not a man on his team knew anything at all of the formation or its execution. Jordan groaned, and his eyes blurred. He would lose the game after all.

Suddenly he thought of Roe. Blenner had explained the trick to him; to the very player whose lack of a cool head would prevent him from recognizing it in time. Why had he been such a fool as not to explain it to the others?

"I must warn them," he told himself, driven almost

frantic by the possibilities of the play. He was unaware of the fact that he was speaking the words aloud. "A single cry—it will break the rules of coaching, but we can't lose; we can't! Oh! why doesn't Roe keep his head?"

He stopped, with his thoughts gone like a flash. Out there on the field, a little player was standing up, just behind the line, waiting like a hawk. He had left his position back in the field, in spite of the other disastrous blunder. It could mean but one thing: Roe had recognized the play.

Jordan whipped the sweater from his shoulders and knelt on the ground. His legs were trembling so that he feared to stand. His face was damp with perspiration. His hands were clenching and loosening spasmodically. In another minute—.

He saw the other quarter-back stoop suddenly, with upturned palms, and the ball snap into them. In the moment of hesitation, the team surged to the left to further the trick. The ball must go through the air, over the unprotected gap, to the right.

The quarter-back whirled and threw the ball with the whole force of his arm. Jordan saw it start, swift and sure as an arrow. But out there, where the gap had been an instant before was Little Roe. He was running forward slowly, gauging his position nicely, and as cool as if the whole game did not depend upon his playing.

Jordan sprang to his feet. He wanted to yell, to shout out at the top of his voice. He was trembling with emotion, and breathing quickly as if he were just regaining his breath.

Something held him back, however, and he stood there silent, grinning like a schoolboy. Little Roe was off down the clear field with the ball! The coach's hands opened and shut as the boy crossed each chalk-mark, and when at last he had scored, the man on the side-lines opened his moist palms and let out his breath with a great sigh of relief. The game had been won through the clear-headedness of Little Roe.

They met in the dressing-room. Jordan's excitement had left him without speech, and he could only take Roe's hand in his and hold it tight. For a long minute the boy gazed at the jubilant crowd about them. Then he turned to the coach, and said, impulsively:

"Merry Christmas, Mr. Jordan."

"Merry Christmas, Roe!" returned the man; and this time there was that in the tone that made the little quarter-back's cheeks glow red and his heart happy.

THE END